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Volume V

On the Wings of the Swan

Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati



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On the Wings of the Swan

Volume V



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On the Wings of the Swan

Volume V

Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati

*Lectures given at Ganga Darshan, Munger,
in 1998, 2009 and 2012*



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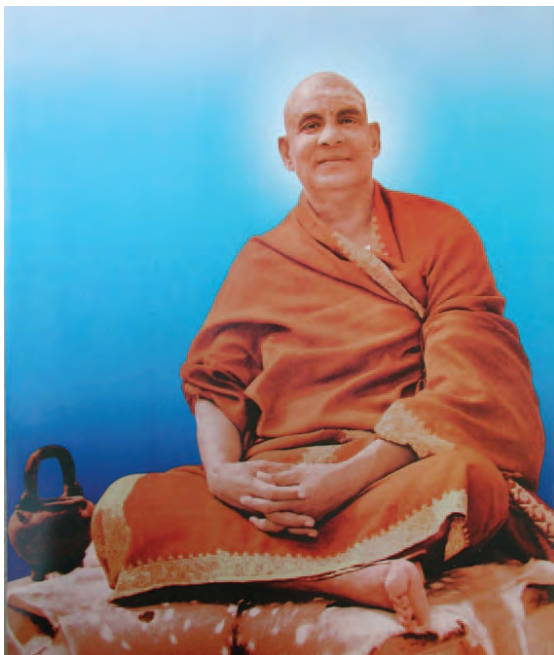
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Dedication

*In humility we offer this dedication to
Swami Sivananda Saraswati, who initiated
Swami Satyananda Saraswati into the secrets of yoga.*

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Seven lectures given at Department of Applied Yoga, Bihar Yoga Bharati, January 1998

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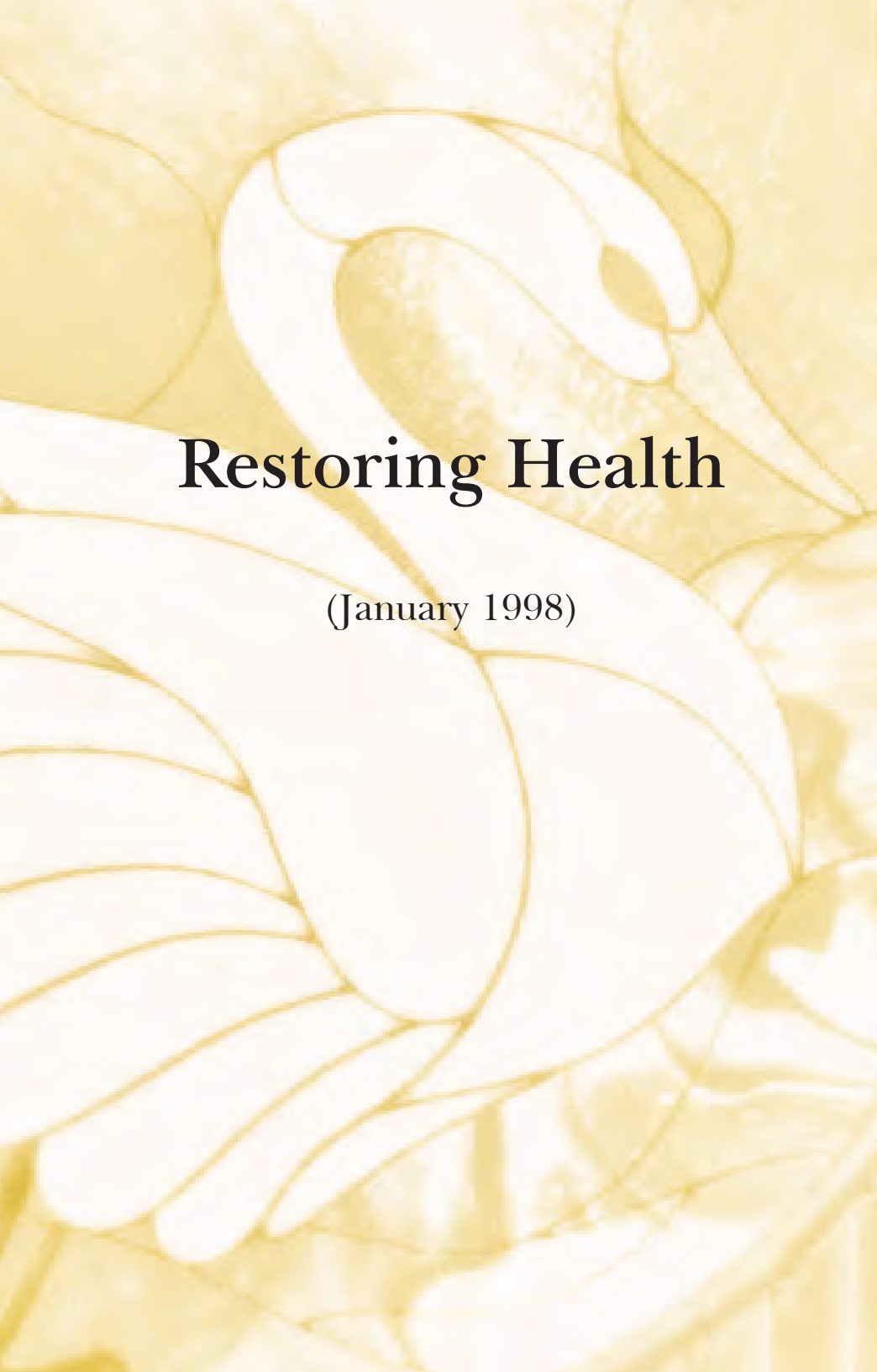
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A stylized white swan is depicted in profile, facing right, set against a yellow background. The background is decorated with large, overlapping, stylized leaf or petal shapes in a lighter yellow or cream color. The swan's neck is elegantly curved, and its tail feathers are visible at the bottom.

Restoring Health

(January 1998)

1

Health and Disease

According to the World Health Organization, health is the wellbeing of the physical, mental, moral and spiritual personality. This has been the yogic belief as well; yoga sees health not merely as the absence of disease from the body, but more as the ability to manage deficiencies, illness and imbalances in the physiological, psychological and spiritual dimensions of human life.

Swasthya or health

The concept of yogic health is defined in the word swasthya. It is derived from the Sanskrit word *swa*, meaning ‘the personal or individual self’, and *stha*, meaning ‘to become established in’. Therefore, *swasthya*, which has been broadly translated as health, means a person who is aware of the nature which is manifesting at present in the body, personality, behaviour, thoughts and actions. This definition of swasthya is similar to the third sutra in Sage Patanjali’s *Yoga Sutras*: *Tadaa drashtuh swaroopē’vasthanam* – “Then the seer is established in his own essential nature.”

When the practitioner becomes established in his own nature, it is not to be taken as relating to the spiritual dimension only, but also to the physical dimension in relation to swasthya. Swaroopa avasthanam and swasthya both mean the same, but have to be understood in context. When we say the *drashta*, the seer, becomes established in his

own nature, it is referring to spiritual experience. When we say that a person becomes established in their own nature, we are referring to the physical, mental, emotional, moral and spiritual aspects of wellbeing. This is the definition of the word health according to yoga.

Causes of illness

Yogis have recognized that it is impossible to become disease-free. A person who takes birth is subject to *vyadhi*, illness, and *jara*, old age. Vyadhi is a natural condition of the body. Illness, disease and disharmony are the natural conditions of the body when it is interacting with the environment, nature, society and the prevailing circumstances. Therefore, being the nature of the body, illness cannot be totally eradicated.

Illness has been broadly categorized in three groups: *adhibhautika*, *adhidaivika* and *adhyatmika*. In the context of health, *adhibhautika* means diseases coming from outside due to external conditions, environmental and dietary factors, pollution, viruses, germs which are both manmade and made by nature. *Bhautika* means the material dimension, the external dimension. In relation to illness and disease, *adhibhautika* is looking at the external environment: the soil, air, water, the elemental causes of problems like pollution.

Adhidaivika is destined ill-health. It can be said to be genetic, it becomes part of the body and of one's destiny from the time of birth. *Daivika* here does not mean divine, but something which human beings have no access to or control over. It is beyond the range of human effort. Plagues, natural calamities, floods, volcanic activities and earthquakes also become factors for giving birth to new illnesses and diseases.

Adhyatmika means disorders which are coming out of one's own being due to either unconscious psychological frustration or emotional tension. The source is in one's own self. *Adhyatmika* means relating to the spirit. *Adhi* means stemming from. Therefore, *adhyatmika* means stemming from the self, due to karmic, genetic, inherited *samskaras*,

and also the unconscious, psychological imbalances that one experiences.

Suffering

These are the three major causes of ill health: external, destined and personal. They have, in fact, been described as causes of suffering, and pain, illness and disease ultimately reflect the involvement with the process of suffering.

These three major causes are further categorized in three groups: *mala*, *vikshepa* and *vikara*. *Mala* means impurities, for example, being subject to a highly polluted environment where the water is bad, the air is bad, and the living conditions are unhygienic and unhealthy. *Vikshepa* means diseases and suffering due to mental traumas or other traumas and shocks which one faces in life. *Vikara* means toxins which inhibit the free expression and the optimum health of the different body systems.

Mala or impurity: *Mala* means an environment or condition which is incompatible with the growth and development of human life. When one lives in that environment for a long time, *mala* becomes the cause of disease. Miners who work in coalmines hundreds of metres underground are continuously inhaling different kinds of gases and coal dust for eight hours every day. These people often suffer from tuberculosis, asthma and respiratory problems due to a detrimental environment which affects their body.

There are people who drink impure water containing thousands of bacteria known and unknown to science. Scientists have found fifty new viruses which are carried by mosquitoes. They can kill, cause cerebral fever or carry what is called 'mosquito-borne disease', for which there is no antidote. There are water-borne diseases affecting the digestive system, pancreas, liver and kidneys. There are air-borne diseases affecting the lungs. There are chemical-borne diseases affecting the immune system. All these are classified as *mala*, impurity.

Vikshepa or dissipation: Vikshepa means the mind which is disturbed, unbalanced and confused. Vikshepa always begins as worry or *chinta*, brooding over something. When vikshepa begins, it changes the state of mind. A dynamic mind can become lethargic, a clear mind can become confused, a positive mind can become negative. This change of the mind-frame affects the nervous system. When a dynamic mind becomes lethargic, it changes the whole physical system and increases the parasympathetic activity, thus lowering the normal vitality and immunity of the body.

Genetically, everyone is born with one weaker organ. In some people the lungs may be weak, in some people the heart, in some the muscles, in some the bones, in others the liver or the kidneys. Everybody has what is known as their Achilles' heel. Vikshepa affects that particular weak organ. If the lungs are weak and one is passing through the state of vikshepa, breathlessness will manifest. If the digestion is weak and one is going through vikshepa, diarrhoea and dysentery will manifest. If the liver is weak, liver-related problems will manifest. If the joints are weak, one will suddenly become aware of pains which one was not aware of before. Vikshepa will always attack the weakest organ of the body and the problem will start increasing from that point on.

Vikara or toxins: Even in a healthy life, there is accumulation of toxins in the body. Accumulated toxins are normally ejected in sweat, urine and faeces, but at times the ejection is less than the quantity one has received. Then the toxins go into the blood and are absorbed by the body, for example, in the muscles. They also become part of the natural acids of the body, like lactic acid. One can be a healthy and dynamic person, but if there is a build-up of toxins in the body, whenever there is a period of inactivity in one's life, the toxins along with the acids in the body will begin to build up in different joints, and if one stretches, one will feel stiffness. Stiffness can become pain, this pain can become arthritis. The pain in the joints or the build-up of acids and toxins in

joints can deform the bones; it can make the bones brittle, as happens in osteoporosis.

One can say that vikara is the somatic group of illnesses, vikshepa is the psychosomatic group of illnesses and mala is the environmental, pollutants and unhygienic conditions that cause illness.

Body and mind

Although these terms are used to indicate a condition of the body or mind due to a condition of life, it should also be remembered that whatever happens at a physical level influences and affects the mind, and whatever happens at a mental level influences and affects the body.

Science has so far accepted two types of conditions: somatic and psychosomatic. Psychosomatic conditions are vikshepa, a state of mind altering the condition of the body. If you are under stress and tension, if you are thinking about something, you will find you are unable to sleep at night. Tension takes away sleep, tension takes away hunger. Stress causes hypertension, obesity and malfunction of other organs. These conditions are classified as psychosomatic by science today, a problem which has its roots in the mind and which is not external. Somatic illness is something which is happening at the physical level and the fear, anxiety or worry in turn affects the mental dimension. It relates more to mala and vikara.

There is another level of illness which has been recognized by yoga, and that is the spiritual psychosomatic. Whatever happens at the physical and mental levels influences and affects the spiritual dimension of a person. Whatever happens at a spiritual dimension affects the mind and the body too. This spiritual psychosomatic is generally defined as illness or suffering due to karma, due to the inherent nature, *prarabdha*.

These are the various concepts and definitions of health and disease according to the yogic system.

Five koshas

Sickness affects the entire personality. In order to understand this, one will need to remember the concept of personality as defined in yoga. The human personality is seen as a combination of five different aspects: the physical, pranic, mental, psychic and spiritual dimensions. *Annamaya kosha* is the physical aspect, *pranamaya kosha* the pranic or energy aspect, *manomaya kosha* the mental, *vijnanamaya kosha* the psychic, and *anandamaya kosha* is the spiritual dimension. If there is a problem in annamaya kosha, the physical dimension, it is going to affect the pranamaya, manomaya, vijnanamaya and anandamaya dimensions too.

The link between these various dimensions is that of prana. This can be understood by recalling the gear box in a car. The neutral gear is the pranic gear, the pranamaya kosha, as it is the link with every other dimension. The first gear is annamaya, the second gear is manomaya, the third gear is vijnanamaya and the fourth gear is anandamaya. Therefore, yogis have always emphasized that prana shakti should awaken before anything else. That is the basic principle of yoga therapy. The awakening of prana shakti is emphasized for the management of imbalances in these various dimensions. An imbalance in prana will affect the performance of the physical, mental, psychic and spiritual personalities. For example, somebody throws a pollutant in our well, the main source of water for the ashram. When that water is pumped into various tanks and buildings, the same polluted water will come out of the taps. In the same way, the moment prana shakti is activated, guided and directed, one will gain control over annamaya, manomaya, vijnanamaya and anandamaya koshas.

Therefore, in the yogic traditions more emphasis has been given to stimulation and activation of prana. The traditional scriptures of yoga speak volumes on prana and just a few pages describe the ten or twelve asanas considered to be major. Whether it is one of the Yoga Darshan Upanishads or any other text on yoga, the most emphasis is

on pranayama, then on *dhyana*, meditation, with asana in the minority.

Three doshas

The constitution of the body is specific and yogis have identified three different constitutions which are also recognized in Ayurveda. The first constitution is excessive *kapha*, the body retaining mucus. The second is excessive *pitta*, the body generating a lot of bile. The third is *vata*, the body generating a lot of wind. Each person is actually identified either as kapha dominant, pitta dominant or vata dominant. This characteristic of the body begins at birth and continues until death.

Depending on what kind of characteristics one has, the diseases directly influence the imbalance or the particular condition of the body. For the vata dominant group, the lungs and stomach will be affected more as vata disorders. The pitta group has to manage bile which affects the digestive organs, the nervous, circulatory and cardiovascular systems. Excessive bile can lead to heart attack, angina, herpes, malfunction of the brain, and disorders of the joints and skeleton, as bile is an acid. The kapha group with excessive mucus will suffer in three main areas: obesity, chest congestion affecting the lungs and heart, and digestive problems.

When restoration of health is considered through the practices of yoga, one does not look at disease as a problem which needs to be eradicated. There is greater concentration on restructuring and harmonizing the physical characteristics, and creating proper harmony between body, mind and spirit.

Four factors causing illness

If we make a list of the different factors causing illness, the first would be elemental, not environmental. After all, our environment is composed of different elements, so for the sake of understanding we can use the term 'elemental'.

Impurities are in the earth, air and water. Fire is not impure and sky is not impure. Earth, air and water are the three main elements which become subject to change due to impurities. This is one factor.

The second factor is the human mind, and the major factor in relation to the human mind is the nature of tamas. We cover up our tamasic nature by giving our expressions a meaning with which we are satisfied. If we criticize somebody, we'll say, "We are trying to improve that person, therefore we are criticizing them." If we speak ill of anyone, we will cover it up by saying, "We are showing the negative points so that the person can improve." These are all coverings. The real tendency of the mind is towards tamas, and that is a major factor in the emergence of mind-related conditions which create disease in the body, impurities in the environment and changes in our lifestyle.

The third factor is the weak organ of the body, the Achilles' heel. In every person there is one organ which is genetically weak, and it is that organ which becomes affected by the changing environmental, social and personal conditions.

The fourth factor are the viruses and bacteria, which we take into our bodies through water, food and air. They find their place in our body and begin to multiply. Nowadays, there are other types of contacts too, including chemical overdose, sexual contact and contact with infected blood, that can cause diseases such as hepatitis B and HIV. These diseases are due to viruses and bacteria which take birth due to unhygienic conditions. These four factors have been the main causes of disease as recognized by yoga: elemental, mental, bacterial and inherited weak organs.

2

Yogic Management of Illness

When we talk of managing conditions to restore health, the different areas and environments in which one interacts have to be taken into consideration. The body suffers due to illness and disease when there is a reduction of the vital force in the physical body. There is a deficiency in the immune system when there is disease and pain. The body, being the main object which experiences pain, illness and suffering, has to be managed first.

Beyond the symptom

Yoga has described ways to manage the conditions of the body, but at the same time the treatment should not only be symptomatic, it should also look at the cause. Therefore, it has been the experience of yoga teachers that even though yoga therapy is a slow process, it ensures the health of the entire personality, not only eradication of a physical problem. Sometimes the management of an illness through yoga can take many, many years. But one thing is sure and certain, that if the method is right, regardless of the time it takes, one will be able to eradicate the problem completely and experience total health.

There are disciplines and restrictions given as guidelines, which need to be followed, however. It has been stated in all the major literature of yoga that if one is able to adhere to the norms, discipline, practice and restrictions of yoga diligently,

there is no disease which cannot be helped by yoga. Swami Satyananda said many times that yoga has the potential to cure the incurable, provided there is regularity and strict adherence to restrictions, including the dietary factor.

Many yoga teachers not only teach the physical practices of asana and pranayama, but they also include relaxation and meditation techniques. These kinds of combinations can make people think, 'How is meditation going to help my pain? How is yoga nidra and relaxation going to help my problem, disease or illness?' However, from the yogic perspective, the therapy is never complete if these components are not included, as asanas only stimulate and restore the pranic balance in the deficient organs. Pranayama increases the vitality of the body and the immune system. Yoga nidra or relaxation techniques release the tensions which are deeply embedded in the muscles and nerves, and allow the mind to relax by becoming free from anxiety for some time. Meditation helps to harmonize the internal dissipations and focuses the mind to deal with the disease or illness.

Requirements for therapy

Yoga therapy takes a long time, as it is not dealing with symptomatic treatment. It is not that for a headache one does neti, or for diabetes one does this, or for asthma one does that. Yogic techniques relieve the symptoms, there is no denying it, but at the same time, they also work at deeper levels of the human body, personality and nature. It is not only a question of removing the boil from the body, but also of purifying the blood, eliminating toxins, managing tensions, stresses and the causes of vikara, toxins. One follows the guidelines for lifestyle and diet, practises the appropriate hatha yoga techniques regularly and also creates the ability to allow the mind to relax and not to be under continuous stress and tension. One learns to allow the mind to focus and not be like an uncontrolled monkey. These are the levels where yoga works in order to simply remove one

tiny boil. Therefore, it is going to take time just to treat one condition, but this time is well used, providing absolute health, restoring proper efficiency and performance of the afflicted organs and restructuring the entire physical, mental and pranic systems. In yogic management of illness, patience is the first requirement, continuity the second, regularity the third, and adhering to the rules the fourth.

Sanyam

The prerequisite for making any kind of therapy effective is restraint or *sanyam*. Sanyam of what? First is *ahara sanyam*, restraint or proper management of dietary habits. Second is *indriya sanyam*, restraint of the senses, in order to control over-indulgence in sensorial participation. Third is *vichara sanyam*, restraint of thoughts, maintaining a positive attitude rather than worrying or being fearful.

Whenever there is illness, the mind tends to become negative and begins to worry. Thoughts are actually projected to increase the intensity of the disease and this relates to *vikshepa*, dissipation. In the case of Disease Induced Fear Syndrome (DIFS), one has to move into the area of *vichara sanyam*, restraint of thoughts. In order to manage tensions, anxieties and stresses in any area of life, one needs *vichara sanyam*. In yoga the main purpose of *vichara sanyam* is not to stop worries and fears, but to maintain a positive and optimistic outlook.

The fourth sanyam is *vyavahara sanyam*, restraint of behaviour. This becomes easy when the other three sanyams are attained. Behaviour means interaction, and in *vyavahara sanyam* one of the prerequisites is *viveka*, discrimination, knowing what is right and what is wrong.

These four sanyams are prerequisites for health. If one is able to follow them, even the characteristics of the body can be managed whether it be *kapha*, *pitta* or *vata*. These can be controlled through *ahara*, food. By performing sanyam, one can change the natural characteristics and conditions of the body. This is the basic principle of yoga therapy.

3

Hatha Yoga

In order to restore health, yoga identified certain practices which help the body overcome its imbalances, harmonize the physical structure, restore the stamina and strength of the internal organs and ensure that they function properly.

Asanas

If we look at the traditional scriptures of yoga, we find that advanced asanas have been prescribed in order to manage different illnesses. In *Gheranda Samhita*, for example, major asanas like mayurasana, vyaghrasana, sarvangasana or paschimottanasana have been described. However, before we can actually attempt to practise these asanas, we have to consider that the body has to be brought to a state where it can benefit from the practice of such asanas. Therefore, there are two stages. The first stage is the process and the second stage is perfection.

The scriptures have described the perfection aspect; however, when we look at our own physical nature, we see some people are young, some old, some flexible, some stiff, some fat and some thin. In these physical conditions it is not possible to achieve absolute perfection in one asana immediately. First we have to create the corresponding changes and prepare the body.

Flexibility

The general need for preparing the body is flexibility. If the body is stiff, rather than being able to practise an asana in the correct manner, we will be creating more stress and tension in the body, which is harmful to the physical condition. Therefore, it is always advised that the physical body be prepared initially with asanas which provide flexibility.

The first two systems to work with are the skeletal system and the muscular system. By providing mobility and flexibility we also release tensions, toxins, tightness and deformities of joints and muscles, and ensure there is proper circulation throughout the body, not only of blood but also of prana shakti.

There can be blockages of prana shakti just as there are blockages of blood, due to body posture and pressure in different parts of the body. Sometimes there is a reduction in the blood supply to various parts and organs, which we can feel. When we change the posture we feel the flow of blood and the tingling again, we feel sensitive again in that particular part. Although prana shakti is much more subtle than blood, blockages do happen and they also stop the organ from being strong and active.

Asanas which provide flexibility are pawanmuktasana part one for the joints and muscles, pawanmuktasana part two for the lower back, hips, waist, spine and stomach area, the trikonasana series for the spinal cord and major skeletal and muscular structures, and the shakti bandhas to coordinate the muscular movements of the body by stretching and releasing, expanding and contracting different muscles.

These four major groups of asanas provide flexibility and relieve stress, tightness and tensions from the muscular-skeletal system. They are recommended to perfect major yoga asanas whether for a spiritual or a therapeutic purpose.

Shatkarmas

Just as we have prepared the muscular-skeletal system to practise the advanced therapeutic asanas, we also need to improve the stamina and energize the internal organs. In hatha yoga, the shatkarmas aim at reducing the intensity of mala, vikara and vikshepa. Six hatha yoga practices are known as shatkarmas, cleansing practices. *Shat* means six and *karma* means action: *neti*, nasal cleansing with water; *dhauti*, cleansing of the alimentary canal; *basti*, yogic enema; *navli*, abdominal massaging; *kapalbhati*, frontal brain cleansing; and *trataka*, concentrated gazing. The aim of the shatkarmas is to create harmony between the two major pranic flows, ida and pingala, in order to attain physical and mental purification.

Neti is for the head region. The benefits of neti are for problems related to the nose, eyes and ears. Inside the nose, the nasal membrane contains many little membranes. Not all are necessarily mucous membranes. These membranes have different roles to play. Some membranes are connected with the visual area of the brain, some with the auditory part of the brain, and others with the olfactory part of the brain. All these membranes are located inside the nostrils and in the upper throat region above the palate.

In the practice of neti, as the water goes through the mucous membrane, it touches the other membranes on its way and stimulates them. The temperature, force and flow of water stimulate them, and therefore many people find tears come to their eyes in the initial stages of neti practice. They begin to shed tears profusely, and many times the ears will pop after completing neti. Neti has been designed more to help the condition of mala, impurity, in the membranes. It removes the mala, the dust and dirt that is absorbed by the membranes, the excess dryness or wetness, and provides a proper healthy structure to the membranes.

Dhauti is meant for the stomach and the oesophagus, to bring out the excess doshas from the system through the mouth. *Kunjali kriya*, regurgitative cleansing, is a type of dhauti done with water, called *vaman dhauti*. Basti is for the

small and large intestines, to remove the vikara or toxins. Therefore, neti is mainly for mala, dhauti is for mala and basti is for vikara.

Kapalbhati is related to the head. It is normally combined with neti in hatha yoga. After we do neti, we practise either kapalbhati or bhastrika. Therefore, for the head we are using two hatha yoga techniques.

Nauli is related to the digestive functions. The benefits of nauli are gained to some extent when we do *poorna shankhaprakshalana*, full washing of the intestines, or *laghoo shankhaprakshalana*, short intestinal wash. Although we do not practise nauli at that time, still the asanas which we do during shankhaprakshalana are providing the same movement. Whether we practise the five asanas of shankhaprakshalana or practise only nauli, the benefit and effect is the same.

Since people find it difficult initially to practise nauli due to their stomach being bloated with water, Swami Satyananda replaced nauli with these five asanas to make it more scientific. There is traction in *tadasana*, palm tree pose, which opens up the knots of the intestines and stomach. *Tiryak tadasana*, swaying palm tree pose, allows the water to swish and *kati chakrasana*, waist rotating pose, squeezes the water down. In *tiryak bhujangasana*, twisting cobra pose, a supine posture, lateral pressure is created, after having created vertical pressure previously. *Udarakarshanasana*, abdominal stretch pose, a squatting posture, is more like nauli itself, where we are actually compressing the stomach region and forcing and squeezing the water out.

The effect of nauli is similar to these asanas. When one is able to perfect nauli, there are three movements. One movement is pulling the stomach in, as in *uddiyana bandha*; at that time one creates downward and upward pressure. The second movement is the lateral movement of the muscles, and that is like swishing the water. The third is a vertical, up and down movement of the diaphragm, which is again creating a downward pressure.

There are different reasons for doing shankhaprakshalana. If it is done for therapeutic purposes, as in diabetes, it is advised to practise it for forty days continuously. If it is done due to a stomach problem which is not a major disease, but just an uneasy feeling in the stomach, like indigestion, it can be done according to one's choice. One can do it every day or on alternate days for up to seven days. However, there are dietary restrictions to be observed.

Kunjal done at the end of shankhaprakshalana also has a different purpose. When one practises kunjal, creating pressure to bring the water out, one is forcefully using the muscles, and cleaning the oesophagus, windpipe and lungs. Any excess mucus in these regions is forced out. If one simply does shankhaprakshalana without kunjal, mucus will remain.

If water is brought out through the mouth, it is dhauti; if it is brought out through the rectum, it is basti. Therefore, shankhaprakshalana is basti, but if it is combined with the practice of kunjal, shankhaprakshalana includes the benefits of dhauti. Dhauti is upward movement and basti is downward movement. Shankhaprakshalana, whether laghoo or poorna, is always a basti kriya.

Trataka

The sixth shatkarma is trataka which is one of the important practices of pratyahara. If you practise trataka at night before going to bed, you will see that when you lie down afterwards, the mind is absolutely quiet; there is no vikshepa of mind, there is no confusion or movement of mind.

The quality of sleep is totally different when you practise trataka at night. Many times people can't sleep after trataka. That is another issue and the reason is simple. When you practise trataka the mind relaxes, as the state of concentration stops the mind from distracting itself and going in hundreds of directions giving birth to different kinds of thoughts. When the mind is concentrated, the thoughts automatically align themselves and there is no dissipation or distraction.

The brain has a big visual centre. When you confine your vision to observing a flame only, and the eyes are not moving around grasping objects and seeing images, the brain is not processing them, so at that time there is cerebral relaxation. The cerebral relaxation combined with mental harmony and the state of concentration changes the entire quality of sleep, consciousness and mind.

Sleep is considered to be necessary for the maintenance of health, but if you want to overcome sleep, trataka is an effective technique. Practise trataka for half an hour and after that you will see that there is no sleep, no matter how tired or exhausted you were before. Even if you are able to sleep, the quality of sleep is different; it is deep, relaxing and short.

Neti, dhauti and basti are the three practices of purification. Kapalbhati, nauli and trataka are the three practices for mental purification and harmony. The propagators of hatha yoga included trataka in this group of shatkarmas, although trataka is not a physical exercise of purification. It is not like neti, dhauti, basti, kapalbhati or nauli. Trataka is a technique of meditation, yet it is considered to be a cleansing, purifying, relaxing and harmonizing technique due to its immediate effect on the brain and mind.

These are the six techniques of hatha yoga which, when practised along with the four groups of asanas (pawanmuktasana part one and two, the shakti bandhas and the trikonasana series), prepare and allow the body to eventually move into the advanced techniques of asanas, which continue to help relieve the disease. The most common form of hatha yoga recognized today incorporates the shatkarmas, mudras and bandhas, as well as some other advanced asanas and pranayamas.

Mudras

Mudra is another group of practices in hatha yoga. There are different kinds of mudras which have been classified in broad categories as head mudras, hand mudras and body mudras,

such as *vipareeta karani mudra* in which the entire body is inverted into a mudra. Amongst hand mudras, the most common examples are jnana mudra and chin mudra, which are used during meditation. Amongst the head mudras, the most common mudras are shambhavi mudra, involving the eyes, and khechari mudra, involving the tongue. Many other mudras fall into these three categories.

Mudras are psychophysiological locks or psycho-energetic locks. The practice of mudras helps stop the wastage of prana shakti. It has been determined by researchers that the extremities of the body are the cause for the loss of prana shakti. There is a continuous discharge of prana shakti from the fingertips and also from the eyes. When one practises a mudra, one not only tries to contain the prana shakti, but also to reverse the flow of prana shakti.

There are also different mudras related to different organs of the body. In the practice of hridaya mudra, for example, the fingers actually act as pressure points, stimulating the prana shakti in the heart and bringing about a calming effect. Many people have practised hridaya mudra for heart problems and felt that it has helped them. The practice of these mudras, apart from realigning the flow of prana in a particular organ, also activates the prana shakti.

The advanced asanas in hatha yoga are those asanas in which the body automatically triggers a particular bandha or mudra. One example is brahmacharyasana, where there is an automatic contraction of the perineal muscle, and therefore an automatic moola bandha occurs.

Bandhas

Looking at the group of mudras as defined in hatha yoga, one finds a subgroup called bandhas. *Bandhas*, or locks, are a group of three practices which coordinate the flow of prana shakti throughout the body. These three bandhas are specific. The first is known as *moola bandha*, the perineal lock or contraction. The practice of moola bandha helps in reversing the flow of apana, the downward moving

energy flow. Moola bandha also activates mooladhara and swadhisthana chakras. The purpose of *uddiyana bandha*, the abdominal lock or contraction, is to activate and prepare manipura chakra as the centre for the fusion or union between prana, apana and samana. The third bandha is *jalandhara bandha*, the throat lock. With jalandhara bandha a negative pressure is created, forcing the natural upward flow of prana to flow downwards. With the practice of moola bandha apana flows upwards, with the practice of jalandhara bandha prana flows downwards, and with the practice of uddiyana bandha prana and apana merge with samana, the sideways moving energy flow between the navel and diaphragm. This is the purpose of the bandhas.

Importance of the basics

While preparing the body, another miracle happens. As one reduces vikara and mala from one's personality and nature, many of the physical, psychosomatic or spiritual problems are automatically reduced. Disease and illness, whether physical, mental or spiritual, are generated when there is an accumulation of toxins. It is like saying, "Mosquitoes will not breed in flowing water; they will only breed in stagnant water." If the energy is flowing and the body is pure, there is little chance for the roots of disease to go into our body and personality. Therefore, we find that many times people begin to feel better without actually using any major postures for therapy, but just with the practice of pawanmuktasana and shatkarmas.

It has been my personal experience, in all the years of teaching yoga, that about forty to fifty percent of problems, diseases and illnesses were helped with only the basic group of shatkarmas and pawanmuktasana. The people who could not be helped by these basic practices were helped once they moved on to the advanced asanas. Therefore, we always emphasize the practice of basic yoga rather than the advanced yoga practices. We teach advanced yoga when necessary, but we always recommend and emphasize the

practice of pawanmuktasana. If one can practise neti, kunjla and laghoo shankhaprakshalana in its most basic form, up to forty to fifty percent of one's health will be regained. Whatever is not regained by this method will be regained with the help of advanced asanas, which directly affect the internal organs of the body.

Yoga therapy has another role also. As a general rule, it is always advised that for every forward bend one practises a backward bend, for every inverted posture one practises a vertical posture, so that physical balance is maintained. However, in any type of respiratory problem, the recommended asanas are the backward bending asanas which expand the chest. In any kind of digestive problem, whether constipation, diarrhoea, dysentery, liver or kidney problems, indigestion, diabetes or excessive gas, the recommended asanas are the forward bending asanas which compress the internal organs.

Thus, when practising hatha yoga to improve one's health, this is the role of asanas and shatkarmas. Remember, in the restoration of health there are preparatory stages which have the ability to restore at least fifty percent of health without attempting any other difficult techniques of yoga.



4

The Mind

The word *vrutti* means a circular pattern, like a whirlpool, and *chitta vrutti* means modification of the mind. Feeling is a vrutti, emotion is a vrutti, intellect is a vrutti, attitude is a vrutti, and all the defined dimensions of mind are vrittis. In the *Yoga Sutras* of Sage Patanjali, five kinds of *vrittis* or aspects of recognizing different mental states are categorized: *pramana*, right knowledge; *viparyaya*, misconception; *vikalpa*, unfounded belief or fantasy; *nidra*, the state of sleep; and *smriti*, memories. *Pramana*, which is defined as cognition, is also associated with feeling, emotion, attitude, logic and the senses. *Viparyaya* is again associated with emotion, belief, logic, feelings, attitude and the senses. *Vikalpa*, *nidra* and *smriti* are also associated with all the different expressions of mind. Therefore, it has to be understood that the vrittis defined in the *Yoga Sutras* represent not the individual vrittis, but the quality and association of the mind with the different forms of vrittis.

Chitta shakti, mental energy

Chitta is the mind, the mental make-up, *chitta shakti* is the total mind, and *chitta vrittis* are the modifications of mind. This mind interacts with the world of objects through *jnana*, knowledge, *iccha*, will, and *kriya*, action. Knowledge, will and action are the three qualities of the mind which come into play in our life. These three components of the mind are in continuous association with *buddhi*, logic, *smriti*, memories,

bhava, feeling, *vasana*, passions, and *kamana*, desires. The motivating factors for fulfilling a desire are *jnana*, *iccha* and *kriya*. The catalysts to obtain a goal in life are *jnana*, *iccha* and *kriya*.

If we move into the associations of mind, we encounter other manifestations and sub-manifestations of *chitta shakti*. The sub-manifestations of *chitta shakti* are realized when it becomes totally involved and engrossed with the world of objects and the world of senses. The association of *chitta shakti* with the world of objects and senses creates likes and dislikes, attractions and repulsions, which in the *Yoga Sutras* (2:7 and 2:8) have been defined as *raga* and *dvesha*: *Sukhaanushayee raagah; Duhkhaanushayee dveshah* – “*Raga* is attraction towards pleasure. *Dvesha* is the repulsion accompanying suffering.”

Raga and *dvesha* are the associations of the mind with the sensory world and the world of objects. The association further leads to the experiences of happiness, fear, joy, contentment, insecurities and aversions. These are symptoms: joy is a symptom, fear is a symptom, aversion is a symptom, and passion is a symptom of a mental association with the environment. Therefore, in the practice of meditation, for example, when the mind can be isolated from these external experiences, traditions have stated that one can overcome, transcend and transform these mental manifestations of fear, anxiety, insecurity, fleeting happiness, and the quests for pleasure and contentment. People have experienced that.

Experience of the associations of the mind is common to every being created in this world, whether human or animal. After all, animals also experience associations of the mind. Whether it is a logical association, an emotional or instinctive association, whatever it may be, they also experience these associations. A dog recognizes a master, but there is no intellect in the dog which says, “This person is my master.” It is only a play of association. Animals may not have the same type or quality of intellect as human beings; they may not be able to express the same type of emotion or feeling as human

beings, nevertheless the ability of the mind to interact with different objects, situations and conditions exists in them and they also experience fear, happiness, stress, tension and insecurity.

Buddhi

In relation to human beings, chitta shakti takes on a different colour due to buddhi, in the sense of logic and intellect. The use of intellect, or a deeper identification with buddhi, differentiates a human being from other forms of creation. However, this identification with buddhi leads to a lessening of awareness of the deeper aspects of the mind. The instinctive and intuitive aspects of the mind are reduced. Therefore, our ideas, thoughts and experiences simply revolve around this component of buddhi. We try to find a logical reason for everything, whether it is a dream, a memory, an experience of pain and pleasure, or a belief. Our buddhi, which is the predominant part of our mind, becomes the cause of confusion as well. We are continuously stimulating only one aspect of our mind, buddhi, and not really caring for or considering other aspects of the mind.

The association of buddhi with the senses and the world of objects becomes the cause of extroversion, *bahirmukha*. In this state of externalization, when we are not in touch with the source of our strength, peace and joy, different vrittis begin to form in the mind, which make us lose self-esteem, which make us arrogant or fearful. A superiority complex or inferiority complex takes root. The complexes we experience in life are the roots which come out due to the externalized state and associations of buddhi with the world around. It is the beginning of stress and tension in life as well.

Meditation – the SWAN principle

We can give many reasons as to why we become tense and stressed, but those reasons are only superficial. After analyzing deeply, we will realize that it has to do with the component of buddhi. Therefore, meditation has been

given an important role in yoga, as it helps us to internalize and become introverted and not extroverted. The normal buddhi is extroverted, but meditation makes us introverted. Meditation allows us to connect with the instinctive and intuitive dimensions of the mind. The moment we are able to connect with the instinctive and intuitive aspects of our mind, there is a reduction of anxiety and attainment of peace and contentment, *santosha*.

How do we recognize the trait of our mind? By recognizing and identifying certain qualities or conditions of our life which represent the strength of our character, the weakness of the character, the ambitious nature of our character and by recognizing those conditions in life which are our actual needs. This is one simple way of knowing our character. Recognizing the strength, weakness, ambition and need is known as the SWAN theory.

In everyone's life there is strength, weakness, the desire to attain, and a need which has to be fulfilled. Due to the extroversion of the mind, many times there is confusion, *vikalpa*, doubt, *viparyaya*, confusion of identity, confusion of reality. We are pulled to the negative expressions of the mind. Rather than recognizing the strengths of our character, we identify with the weaknesses of our character and therefore suffer. Rather than recognizing what our needs are, we identify with our ambitions and there is struggle.

An ambition can become a strength provided you know that it is attainable and maintainable, that it is not going to create other repercussions, whether tamasic or rajasic, and that it is not going to alter your mental frame and divert your attention totally from your goal. Ambition is necessary; it is not useless. After all, it is due to ambition that you study, it is due to ambition that you earn. Ambition always represents personal drive, but many times this personal drive can become unattainable due to certain situations or circumstances. When your ambition becomes unattainable, yet you are unable to come out of the set mind-frame, you go into depression.

Imagine you complete your studies and want to go overseas but your family calls you back, and suddenly, you find you are responsible for the family. You have to change all your priorities and adjust to the new priority. Many people can't do it so they become depressed. They continuously think about lost opportunities, become unfit and develop a psychological problem. Ambitions should always be either maintainable and attainable, or they should represent your wisdom: "If this ambition is not happening, I can adjust." The ability to adjust is a human quality, which is known as adaptability, and ambition will only become a strength when there is the quality of adaptability, otherwise ambition will always be a source of conflict and suffering.

Therefore, an attempt has to be made to recognize the SWAN principle in our own life. This is the first step in managing the mind. Until this is done, it becomes difficult or practically impossible to know what the natural quality of our mind is.

Conditioned or unconditioned

A conditioned mind sees things only from its perspective and represents the set patterns of mind. Due to conditioning you always encounter conflict. You have conditioned your mind to feel, believe, see and think in a certain way and it does not match with the way of other people. When you are talking of your ideas and they are talking of their ideas, there is no match, but only discussion, conflict and disturbance. An unconditioned mind is an open mind, in which you are not bound by concepts, beliefs and ideas; rather, you are able to accept the view of the other person, see the validity of it, and if necessary, incorporate it. The conditioned mind is a reactive mind and the unconditioned mind is a non-reactive mind.

When you are in pain and suffering, you continuously ask, "Why is this happening to me, why am I in pain, why am I pressurized?" The 'I' becomes the centre and the vortex of karma, and you lose clarity of mind and thought. In all

the different conditions of life, whether it is an interactive situation, a health situation or a mental situation, you are not able to see the light beyond the conditioning. You forget even the most basic principle of life, namely that 'this too shall pass'. You know that the situation is not going to last, yet at that moment the situation becomes your life. The moment you are out of it, you laugh at yourself. However, when your reactions have become a part of your nature and no matter how much you try to change yourself you are not motivated, that is known as karmic or samskara conditioning.

Pratyahara

The natural attribute of an individual is sattwic, rajasic or tamasic. People talk about converting the nature of their mind from tamasic to sattwic, from rajasic to sattwic. The tradition speaks of it as the goal, but the process is through pratyahara, dharana and meditation. We become aware of our strengths and encourage the strengths to overcome the weaknesses, recognize our needs and allow the faculty of discrimination to decide what is an attainable ambition and what is a non-attainable ambition. This happens in pratyahara. However, when there is agitation and confusion, what do we become aware of? The iccha, the desire, the will. This desire manifests in the form of a thought, *vichara*. The desire cannot be identified, but when the desire associates itself with buddhi, it will come up in the form of a thought.

In pratyahara we start with thought observation, the practice of antar mouna. When an emotion associates with buddhi, it will be experienced in the form of an energy explosion inside, and that energy explosion can be anger, hatred, jealousy, greed or fear. In order to manage the emotional upheavals there is the practice of antar darshan. For thought it is *antar mouna*, inner silence, and for emotion it is *antar darshan*, vision of the inner self. These are the meditative techniques which can help us to gradually recognize the associations of mind and to harmonize them.

While this process is going on, in order to reduce the accumulation of tensions and stresses which alter our behaviour and our perceptions, we need to practise something which can help us relax, and that is the practice of yoga nidra. When stresses and tensions, conditions and the environment which surrounds us alter our normal perception, then that state is known as *manovikara*, mental toxins.

Mental toxins are stresses, anxieties, tensions and insecurities which alter the harmony of mind. In order to regain harmony of mind and in order to get rid of the manovikaras, there is the practice of *nyasa* which is known to us as yoga nidra. For any kind of mental imbalance, psychosomatic or emotional problem, three practices are most useful. After the completion of yoga nidra, one should practise antar mouna and ajapa japa. Then, after practising these three, in order to carry on the effect of mental harmony into the body, one should practise trataka. Trataka will convert the mental harmony into physical harmony, focusing the input and output of the senses.

These pratyahara practices further permit the management of other chitta vrittis. It is for this reason that in all the scriptures and traditions, pratyahara is always classified as the initial stage of meditation. In fact, many scriptures do not talk about yamas and niyamas or even asana and pranayama; they only talk of pratyahara and dharana.

If somebody just talks about pratyahara and dharana, it does not mean that they do not have an understanding of the other aspects of yoga. It means they were trying to develop an aspect of yoga which can help in the management and restoration of mental health, as mental health is the prime requisite for perfect health. Rather than physical health, mental health is the main requisite for perfect health.

Mental imbalance

For a mentally unbalanced person, one needs to adopt a different approach. For a healthy person, healthy in the sense that one does not really have much of a mental or

physical problem, one can start this sequence of pratyahara practices, and it will increase the quality and capacity of the mind, as well as expand it.

Mentally unbalanced people are different altogether, as they are already in a grave mental state. They are gripped by the gravity of confusion, not knowing what to do. No matter if twenty people tell them, “This is the right thing to do”, they will always doubt it. Or they are caught in the gravity of depression. No matter how hard other people try, the person remains in a state of depression.

Therefore, one has to see not only which aspect of the physical body, but also which other kosha is being affected. For a person who is depressed, as an example, the pranic body is weak, so one needs to activate the pranic body first before bringing them to other aspects of yoga. For a person who is hyperactive, either continuously talking or continuously moving, a different approach has to be adopted. Through asana their pranic system can be regulated.

Depending on the type of mental imbalance, one has to work first with the pranic structure. If there is low prana, one has to generate prana. If there is hyper-prana, one has to lower that prana. Only when pranayama kosha is balanced will they respond to other therapies, otherwise one can try every kind of therapy and it will fail. The modern methods of treatment are through chemicals, giving drugs to either become passive or active. However, this chemical change does not create a pranic change. While the chemicals are active in the body, the person is all right, but as soon as the intensity and effects of the chemicals subside, the person goes back to the original state.

Catatronics

Catatronics are people who live in a different world. If one raises the arm of a catatonic, he will hold it there for hours: there is no awareness. If he is standing up looking at something, he will be staring for hours. For such people it is difficult to practise pranayama or any other yoga. When I was living in the USA, I went to a mental hospital which had

a wing with about forty to fifty catatonic patients. I was asked, “Can yoga help these people?” I said, “Two things can help: yoga and the person who can make them practise yoga.”

I trained the supervisors to actually go to each patient and close the left nostril, as they were unable to do it for themselves. I told the nurses and other staff, “You make them do this.” It was great fun for everybody. Every day the staff had to spend fifteen minutes with each patient, just holding the nose, but after a month these people began to respond, and after some time, these catatonics were actually practising pranayama on their own steam. The management was happy with this improvement. Even though initially the caretakers had to work hard to go to each patient, their effort helped the patients.



5

Prana

Prana is the connector and link between various bodies and dimensions of existence. There are two approaches to prana shakti. One approach is to connect with the prana shakti which exists all around us in the environment. The other approach is to stimulate and awaken the prana shakti that is lying within the body.

Prana shakti

Prana shakti is contained in the air we breathe. More specifically, it is contained in the air in the form of negative ions, the electrically charged particles of oxygen. A clear example of the interaction between the positive and negative ions is the change from summer to monsoon. When the first rains fall the negative ions in the atmosphere increase sharply, and people feel full of energy. As we breathe in the charged air particles, or negative ions, the physical body goes through a transformation where each and every cell of the body is charged with electricity. A body charged by the negative ions expresses stamina, vitality, dynamism and clarity. In the environment prana shakti is represented by the negative ions.

The second aspect is much more subtle than the negative ions. It is the coordination of all the different physical organs and systems with the process of breathing in and breathing out. In fact, if we analyze this aspect of breathing in and

breathing out, we find that it is the major activity which keeps us alive. We can live as a blind person, we can live as a deaf person, but we cannot live without breathing. The main function of the nose is to convert the air that we breathe in into life-force. This life-force in yoga is known as *ojas*. In relation to prana, the vitality or the life-force which we imbibe from the environment is held in the body. It is this life-force which keeps the body active, but the duration or the potency of this force is not that great. This is indicated by the fact that if we stop breathing for more than three minutes, there is irreparable brain damage. If we stop breathing for more than five minutes, the heart may stop. If we stop breathing for more than seven minutes, there is death. The vitality which we imbibe from the environment depletes quickly.

Pranayama

In order to maintain the vitality of the body, yogis advised the practices of pranayama. The word pranayama is composed of two words, prana and ayama. *Ayama* means to lengthen and *pranayama* means to lengthen the prana. Yogis recognized that the prana which we breathe in is of low potency, only sufficient to make the body live for x number of minutes, but if we can lengthen and increase the potency of prana shakti, lengthen the dimension of prana, then by breathing a few times, we can still be as active as if our respiration was behaving in the normal manner.

This process has been described in swara yoga which says that the slower we breathe, the longer we live. If we can deepen our breath, we will increase our lifespan. If we breathe in short breaths, in shallow breaths, we are using up more of the internal vital force and are not able to replenish that amount with the air we are breathing in. There is more wear and tear in the body and the lifespan is shortened. Yogis have also given examples of different animals. Animals that breathe very fast have short lifespans; animals that breathe very slowly have longer lifespans. It has also been experienced by the yogis that normally we breathe eleven

times per minute, on average, but a yogi who has perfected pranayama breathes only about three to five breaths per minute, and there is an increase of body vitality.

Nadi shodhana

How does pranayama work? According to the yogic concept, the body is fine-tuned to absorb the prana shakti by wilfully lengthening the inhalation and exhalation and by creating a synchronicity of inhalation and exhalation. This becomes evident when we study the different stages of nadi shodhana pranayama. First we are taught to simply become aware of the breath, so that breathing is not an unconscious process. In order to create synchronicity of breath, we have to become conscious of the breathing process. After that, learn to lengthen inhalation and exhalation by incorporating a ratio. We breathe in from one to seven counts, we breathe out from one to seven counts. The final ratio of the breath is twenty-four *matras* or counts: inhaling twenty-four counts, exhaling twenty-four counts, which is the length of the Gayatri mantra.

Yogic texts say, “Breathe in one Gayatri, retain four Gayatris and breathe out two Gayatris.” This kind of instruction indicates the number of *matras* in a mantra. Nadi shodhana is perfected and complete mastery over the breathing process attained when we have perfected 1:4:2:2 Gayatri. That is 24 *matras* for inhalation multiplied by four times for internal retention, multiplied by two times for both exhalation and external retention, and this is attainable. Of course, we are not used to controlling the breath or regulating the breath, but it is attainable. Even in normal times, if we just breathe in one Gayatri and breathe out one Gayatri, in one minute we will be breathing three to five breaths. Therefore, the perfection in pranayama is decided by the ratio and the synchronicity of breath at the time of inhalation and exhalation.

Nadi shodhana becomes effective when we are able to breathe in and out to the same count. Just closing the nostril

and opening it will not help as it is just normal breath. Our normal inhalation is always shorter than the exhalation. When we are regulating the length of the breath, we are changing the entire nervous system associated with the respiratory system. After all, even in the respiratory system there are nerves which are responsible for the expulsion of air and the intake of air. If we maintain a certain rhythm, a beat for breathing in and breathing out, the nerves inside the lungs and nostrils have to change their natural rhythm and adopt a different one. This different rhythm will help create a change.

Once we are able to follow this pattern we are creating a rhythm in the respiratory system, which creates its own electrical vitality inside the body, like static energy. If we rub our hands together we are creating static electricity. Similarly, when we are breathing in and out in a synchronized manner, this synchronicity affects the flow of ida and pingala. When ida and pingala are totally synchronized with each other, they tend to generate static energy in the physical body and that becomes the first step in the awakening of prana shakti.

Prana vidya

Very few people in the world have, through their own effort, actually awakened the prana shakti in their body. One example is Swami Nadabrahmananda, a disciple of Swami Sivananda. When he came to the ashram, Swami Sivananda told him, “Perfect pranayama.” This swami reached a level of competency in pranayama where he could actually hold his breath without breathing in or out for one hour.

He had another trait; he was a tabla player. When one plays the tabla, one is also exerting physically. Now, research was conducted on Swami Nadabrahmananda by Dr Elmer Green at the Meninger Foundation, USA, using three identical airtight glass chambers. In one chamber they lit a candle, and the candle went out after three minutes, meaning that the oxygen was finished. In another chamber they had a monkey, and the monkey fell down unconscious

after about ten minutes, which meant that there was a high concentration of CO₂. In the third chamber they put Swami Nadabrahmananda.

They had put wax all over his body, plugged all the orifices and attached electrodes to his body. Inside the chamber he had to play the tabla while practising kumbhaka, and he did that for one hour. During this period everybody was convinced that there was not even a particle of oxygen going into his body. The research was done under such tight conditions that there was no possibility of having any fresh air.

When I questioned Swami Nadabrahmananda about how he was able to retain his breath for one hour, he said to me, "I hold the breath in my manipura and from manipura that prana shakti is distributed." He was describing to me the process of prana vidya, which is another technique of yoga, much more advanced than pranayama. The aspirant is guided to generate prana shakti in mooladhara, store it in manipura and distribute it through ajna, which is the system of prana vidya. The process being described by Swami Nadabrahmananda was exactly the process of prana vidya and he said, "After I had perfected my pranayamas, Swami Sivananda instructed me to perfect prana vidya and today I can stop my respiration for one hour comfortably without any side effects." Swami Nadabrahmananda died at the age of ninety-eight.

Another person who had this capacity to hold the breath was Pilot Baba. These people had perfected the art of pranayama.

Pranayama leads to perception of prana shakti and absorption of prana shakti from the environment. The more advanced practice of prana vidya actually taps into the source of prana shakti within the body at the level of the chakras. In the practice of prana vidya, one is taught to have certain experiences by regulating the breath and to intensify those experiences through further breath regulation, visualization, concentration, and the experience of heat and lightness.

With the prana vidya practice the chakras are also activated, more specifically the three chakras: mooladhara, manipura and ajna.

In kundalini yoga, these three chakras are responsible for the awakening and direction of prana shakti. This is the result we receive from the practice of the three bandhas as well. Moola bandha controls mooladhara chakra and it reverses the flow of prana shakti upwards. Uddiyana bandha controls manipura chakra, and jalandhara bandha creates pressure at ajna chakra. Prana vidya combined with the three bandhas can definitely help in producing the subtle pranic energy in the body.

Re-balancing prana

According to the yogic concepts, disease begins with an imbalance of prana. Blood has to circulate all over the body, and if blood is not circulating efficiently through the body, there is going to be stiffness in the joints, and numbness in the muscles, and we know that experience. In order to remove that condition we have to again mobilize the flow. Similarly, there has to be a continuous flow of prana shakti. If prana shakti is blocked in any part of the body, that part is going to suffer due to the deficiency in prana.

What is the yogic therapy for a headache? Bhramari, neti, kapalbhati, shashankasana. Why will neti get rid of a headache? Why will bhramari or kapalbhati or shashankasana get rid of a headache? If you persist, you will be free from headaches, but why? These practices, especially neti, act like acupressure for the nerves which are supersensitive in the sinus areas. After a hard day at work you feel physically and mentally drained, but if you practise neti, pranayama, and after that shavasana for some time, you will feel that your body is regaining its lost vitality, as these practices tend to rectify the deficiency in prana shakti. Different parts of the body are affected by deficient prana shakti, and different dimensions of mind are also affected by lack of prana shakti.

When we are trying to restore health, the yoga teacher first tries to analyze the areas of the body where there is stagnation of prana. Once that area has been identified, we get the person to do some practices which can restore the flow of prana and the person will feel better. In the management of disease, pranayama is the first aspect. People who have the inclination and can go deeper should practise prana vidya along with other yogic techniques. Also, if the deficiency is in prana, if there is an imbalance in prana, then that imbalance can be rectified with the practice of mantras.

Nadis

Traditionally hatha yoga is considered to be the yoga by which we can synchronize the activities of ida and pingala. Hatha yoga is considered to be the primary yoga before the commencement of advanced yogas such as kriya yoga and kundalini yoga. The word *hatha* conveys the meaning or the purpose for which this yoga is designed. *Ha* or *ham* is the bija mantra of pingala and *tha*, *tham* or *ksham* is the bija mantra of ida nadi. The word hatha here indicates the practices of yoga which help in the awakening of pingala and ida forces. These two channels, which are the conductors or carriers of prana shakti, have been identified by the yogis to be the major ones.

According to the yogic tradition, just as there are arteries and veins in the physical body which are known to be the carriers of blood, similarly there are nadis which have their network throughout the physical body and these nadis are the carriers of prana shakti. The word *nadi* comes from the root *nad*, which means flow. Hatha yoga aims at awakening and harmonizing the pranas which are located in the physical body. It aims at purifying the chakras and sensitizing the human perception to become aware of the psychic pranic dimensions of existence.

Pancha prana: five subdivisions of prana

The prana shakti in our body has been classified in five groups according to their function, performance and activity.

The first of these five aspects of prana is called *prana*. It is responsible for life, the maintenance of life, the process of breathing in, and for the activities of the heart and lungs. This prana is located in the chest region.

The second manifestation of prana is *apana* which is responsible for the expulsion of waste matter, toxic matter from the body. It is situated in the lower regions below the navel, between the navel and the perineum, and the sphincter muscles. It controls the large intestine, bladder, liver and pancreas.

The third prana is *samana*. It is situated in the region between the navel and the hollow of the rib cage. It is responsible for assimilation and governs the process of digestion. It controls the stomach, small intestine and other organs of the digestive system.

The fourth type of prana is *udana*. Udana is responsible for the motion of the neck, legs, arms and the activities of the senses in the head region such as sight, hearing, smell and taste. It is also responsible for the activities of the brain. When one has a sluggish brain, udana is depleted.

The fifth prana is *vyana*, which is all-pervasive throughout the body. It is like the second line of defence, the second wind, the reserve prana shakti.

Each prana has a particular motion in the body. Yoga represents the first prana as an upward movement of energy, apana as the downward moving energy, samana as lateral moving energy, udana as a circular movement of energy, and vyana as a static form of energy.

These five pranas also correspond to the chakras in the body. The centres of prana, responsible for nurturing life, are manipura and anahata chakras. The centres for apana are swadhisthana and mooladhara. The centre for samana is manipura. The centre for udana is vishuddhi. The centre for vyana is ajna. These different pranas are connected to the chakras by the two major flows known as ida and pingala nadis. Pingala represents the vital, physical force. Ida represents the passive, mental force. These two nadis

begin from mooladhara, cross each other where the different chakras are located, come up to ajna chakra and from there become one nadi. The practices of hatha yoga aim at purifying the physical organs and body systems so that the five subdivisions of prana which are located in the body are purified, activated and harmonized.



6

Mantra

In hatha yoga the practices of shatkarma, mudra, bandha, asana and also some pranayamas act on the pranic body and realign the pranic system. The combination of hatha yoga, pranayama and prana vidya becomes a potent tool to restore the health of the pranic dimension. Traditionally, therefore, in any kind of yoga therapy, hatha yoga practices and especially pranayama have been emphasized. Then yoga techniques from other branches of yoga have been incorporated.

Mantras are sound vibrations, each having its own pitch, frequency and wavelength. They can be monitored scientifically. In the USA, scientists used computer programming to actually display on screen the corresponding *yantra*, or geometric diagram, of a mantra chanted through a microphone. This further validated the teaching of yoga that mantras represent a state of consciousness. They can alter the state of perception, and in the human mind there is a big area or dimension which is not logical and linear, but artistic, imaginative and symbolic. This artistic, imaginative and symbolic area of consciousness is the area untapped by people or science. Science today tends to rationalize everything, tries to find a meaning, a logical explanation for everything, but all the traditions, including yoga, say that there are certain aspects of our personality and certain dimensions to our life which cannot be explained logically.

Power of mantra

There was a swami in Rikhia who had a lot of physical energy. There was no lack of energy, but she was mentally 'off'. She would do the work she was asked to do, but the moment nobody was watching her, she would start looking at the sky, laughing and muttering something. People classified her as a mad person, but a remarkable change took place in her life when Swami Satyananda gave her the duty of doing the poojas, where she had to chant mantras. Today she is normal. Previously we had heard that mantras can help people, but this is evidence. In her case, there was no dearth of prana, only imbalance in the volume of prana. That imbalance was removed with mantra.

For this reason, in the Indian tradition, people were asked to do three *sandhyas*, ritual, prayers, in the morning, afternoon and evening for five minutes. Now it is considered a religious activity, but the original purpose was to repeat the mantra of Gayatri and Surya three times daily, as these mantras create particular vibrations. Another aspect of prana shakti is vibration, and once the pranic vibrations are synchronized with the mantra vibrations, there is absolutely no imbalance.

A lot of research has been conducted on this subject. Scientists in the USA actually repeated mantras to a computer. While they were repeating the mantras, they were watching the image that the computer was creating due to the sound vibrations. The book, *Mandala* describes how the correct pronunciation of a mantra is able to create the image of its yantra on the computer screen. They found that each mantra created a different yantra on the screen and a perfect replication of Sri Yantra took place on the screen when the person was chanting the corresponding mantra.

The Bihar School of Yoga was the first institute to teach pranayama. Previously there were no books on pranayama. Everybody used to say it was a secret practice and had to be done under the guidance of a guru. However, Swami Satyananda made it a rule that every yoga class must

comprise asana, pranayama, a pratyahara technique like yoga nidra, and one meditation practice to make it a complete system to restore physical health and mental wellbeing.

In his book, *Stalking the Wild Pendulum*, Izhac Bentov describes how feelings, thoughts and energy interact with an object. He gives the example of a stone that is thrown on to the road where everybody is walking. If you pick up that stone and put it on altar and offer it flowers and water every day and worship it, you are actually creating a rapport between the consciousness of the stone and your consciousness. You project your feeling to the stone and awaken the consciousness of the stone through your feelings. In the course of five, ten or fifteen years, the stone becomes *devata*, illumined. It is not an ordinary stone any more. This happens in villages too, where people paint a stone red and call it Kali Ma. It starts out like an ordinary stone but after some time, when people have worshipped it, it generates power. One may say it is due to faith, but it is not only due to faith; it is due to the feelings that are projected.

It works in the same way with mantras too. You can project the mantra and your feeling to a photograph or a concept in your mind. After all, on Saturdays we take people's names and chant a healing mantra. No one has seen them, but we create a concept, "Okay, this is the problem, and we are going to solve it." When everybody is projecting that mantra and feeling to those people, they are helped. This is not the ordinary concept of physics; it is the concept of quantum physics, which defies all rationality. You can practise with a stone, photograph, concept, idea, something abstract or something concrete, as our feelings, minds and consciousness do not work all the time at the concrete dimension; they also work in the abstract dimension.

7

Samskaras and Yantras

One of the illogical yet powerful ideas is samskara and karma. Samskaras and karmas cannot be understood by the intellect nor explained through logic, yet they play a vital role in the management and understanding of human behaviour, nature and personality. Many of the so-called psychosomatic problems arise due to samskaras and karmas, which represent the composition of our nature and personality. We come across people who are externally weak but mentally strong, determined, clear, full of confidence and willpower. The opposite is also true. We come across people who are externally strong and project a lot of confidence, vitality and dynamism, but whose inner life is weak and who are affected quickly by situations and the behaviour of other people, and who consider themselves to be misfits in normal social patterns.

Samskaras

This aspect has not been defined in modern psychology, but yogis believed that consciousness is coloured by samskaras and karmas, and all our efforts and desires in life are guided by them. When we go deep into the samskara level, we will find that the impressions of samskaras are in the form of symbols and images, some of which we can recognize through logic, some of which we cannot recognize, which are abstract or do not convey any intellectual meaning. The

discovery and interpretations of these symbols were the foundation stones of modern psychology, as seen in the book *Man and His Symbols* by Carl Gustav Jung. In fact, this idea of symbols representing consciousness was derived from Jung's studies of Indian traditions and yoga. It is believed that a lot of psychological traumas and the make-up of our mental personality are actually guided by symbols and impressions which are embedded in our consciousness and which have been brought forward in the course of our lives.

Release of trauma

Here are two examples of people who were suffering, one from a physical disease and one from a mental disease, and the role samskaras had to play in the restoration of their health. The first example is of Dr Swami Shankardevananda who has written the book *Yogic Management of Asthma and Diabetes*. Since early childhood he suffered from asthma. He decided to become a medical practitioner, as he felt that he would be able to find an answer to his asthma. After completing his studies in Australia he came to India and lived in the ashram, still suffering from asthma. While practising meditation one night he had a vision of himself as a small boy. His parents had gone to work and the babysitter looking after him was forcing him to eat something which he did not want to eat. She threatened to complain to his parents if he did not eat his dinner, so he forced himself to eat.

This is what he saw in his vision, and from the next day he did not have asthma any more. The relief from his asthma was not due to asana and pranayama. He came to the conclusion that the childhood memory of rejection was the cause of his asthma, and the moment he was able to recall this incident his case resolved itself naturally. The final test was to determine whether asthma was still latent or not, and when he found it was all clear he could say, "Yes, I have been able to eradicate my asthma one hundred percent."

This incident happened to him in early childhood, but the impression of it was retained. Consciously he

had forgotten about it, but whether subconsciously or unconsciously, the image continued and became a block and the cause of a physical imbalance manifesting in the lungs. Any kind of emotional block can manifest as a respiratory disorder. If anybody has a respiratory problem, they definitely have an emotional problem as well. Respiration and emotions are linked together.

The second example is Swami Nishchalananda, who was suffering from a peculiar syndrome similar to claustrophobia. He could not sit in a room with the windows and doors closed, but always had the impulse and desire to open everything. Even in the worst months in Bihar, when dust storms were raging outside and we were closing the windows, he would open them again. In the worst cold wave, when we were closing the windows, he would open the windows even though everybody had to leave the room due to the cold. This claustrophobia manifested in many different ways, opening and closing of doors and windows was just one symptom.

One day, when he was meditating he had a similar experience to Swami Shankardev. He saw himself as a boy who had gone fishing with his father. He had carried bait in a small jar and when he opened the jar, the bait was full of blowflies, and they all came at him at once. The moment he relived this memory, he got rid of his claustrophobia. The suppressed memory of opening the tin and everything coming out was the cause of claustrophobia. Somehow he felt that if everything was closed and bottled up, it would change into blowflies. That simple impression in the life of a twelve-year-old boy became the cause of claustrophobia and the moment he relived that experience he was free from it.

Yantras

These two examples show how childhood impressions can create a change in the mental and physical structure later in life. Imagine how the impressions which we have accumulated in our early childhood, and of which we are not

even aware, have their say in how our life is shaped today. The karmas which we carry forward from our previous lives also have their say in how we define and shape our life today. This is a big area in the yogic tradition which needs to be rediscovered. In order to assist the process of harmonizing the human psyche, there is the whole system of mantras, yantras, pratyahara, dharana and dhyana techniques. Yantras represent the structure of our consciousness. Just as we are recognized by the shape of our bodies, whether we are tall, thin, short, fat, lame, or by the facial features, similarly consciousness is recognized by the images of yantras and mandalas.

Yantras are divided into two groups, the masculine or Shiva yantras and the feminine or Shakti yantras. The masculine yantras represent the conditioning of consciousness and the feminine yantras represent the flow or movement of energy as it happens in that particular level of consciousness. They represent the conditioning, the samskara, the evolution and the regression of consciousness and energy.

Masculine yantras represent the state of consciousness. They are simple, whereas feminine yantras are complex and intricate. The Shiva yantra and Sri Yantra are both made of triangles, but in the Sri Yantra there is much more movement in the triangles. In the Shiva yantra there are only two interlacing triangles. The movement in Shakti yantras represents the progression of energy. In Shiva yantras you will find minimum images or symbols, one square with one triangle, or one circle with one triangle. They are basic and represent the state of consciousness.

In a dream, for example, you see yourself flying in the air over buildings and mountains, which is generally interpreted as overcoming obstacles. If you see the same in the form of a yantra, how will you see it? In relation to yantra the images are sensorial, but the actual experience is non-sensorial. You will see an image of a yantra which is simple and basic, either a circle with a square in the middle, or a square with

a triangle in the middle, or a triangle with a square or circle in the middle, and they represent what you are feeling.

The concept is simple. When the triangle is pointing down, no matter what is said in the scriptures, this triangle means that your perceptions are moving outwards, downwards into the sensorial world. When you see a triangle with the apex up, it means that your perceptions are moving inwards and upwards, towards internalization, intuitive activities and the discovery of your nature.

Just as normal people see dreams, yogis see yantras. Relaxed states of mind will bring a different image and a different colour than an agitated state of mind. What you are trying to achieve by following a path, a sadhana will bring a different Shiva yantra, a different Shakti yantra, to your mind. The interpretation of these yantras has to be done in an accurate way, and they can determine your level of psychic and external maturity.

Building blocks

There are many different varieties of houses. You can just have a basic shelter of four walls and a thatched roof which serves the purpose of living, cooking and sleeping. You can have a house made out of bricks, cement, with a separate kitchen, bathroom, bedroom, dining room, or you can even have a palatial house.

There are different varieties of houses, although they serve the same purpose. In yantras there are also varieties even though they serve the same purpose, namely the realization of different states of consciousness which create and release samskaras and karmas. When we close our eyes we see images in our mind, which are the result of our sensorial interaction with the world. What image do we see when we dream at night for example? We see people, houses, towns and animals; the same objects with which we interact in our daily life. This means the senses have created an impression in our mind and even in sleep we continue to see the same impressions. However, as we go into a meditative process and beyond the

realm of the senses, what images will you see? The images of houses, dogs, animals, people and skyscrapers won't be seen there, as they belong to the sensorial dimension.

When we move into deeper levels of consciousness, the images which we see will be yantras. Therefore, the word *yantra* is made up of two words, *yan* meaning vehicle and *tra* meaning to liberate. *Trayati*, to release, to liberate, comes from the root *tra*. *Yantra* indicates liberation, freeing the vehicle of perception from the bondage of the objective sensorial world, and the vehicle which is freed is the consciousness. The deep-rooted impressions in the form of samskaras and karmas which manifest in our life from the unconscious level actually make up our personality, the way we perceive, analyze, believe and interact.

Samskaras and karmas are the building blocks of our nature and personality. Just as the internal organs make up our body, similarly the samskaras and karmas make up our personality. This combination of samskaras and karmas can create different changes in our behaviour and in the way we perceive the world. If we are not aware of what is happening to us, we find that suddenly our attitude or perception has changed overnight.

Many times when we go to a new place, or encounter a new situation and decide upon a course of action, the entire attitude and thought pattern changes. We become totally geared to face a particular situation. Another person who is watching us will wonder, "Why is he getting all uptight? Why can't he just sail through life, rather than scheme, plan and worry?" This kind of change is happening due to a samskara manifesting in the mind, which cannot be logically or intellectually explained. We are caught in the vortex of the samskaras and karmas, and clarity is lost.

Fulfilment of yoga

Management of samskaras and karmas actually happens through the meditative process defined in yoga as the *pratyahara*, *dharana* and *dhyana* stages. *Pratyahara* helps to

differentiate between what is sensorial and what is coming from one's own nature, to differentiate between the external factors and the internal samskaras or karmic factors. Dharana simply focuses the attention towards the inner factors. The process of transforming and realizing the inner nature actually happens in the state of dhyana. That is one reason why, despite yogis understanding the need to perfect pratyahara and dharana, they always say one should practise dhyana, rather than pratyahara or dharana.

The reason for such a statement is that one has to become more aware of the internal aspects of one's nature. One has to know how consciousness is interacting with the world. One needs to know the cause of imbalance within the consciousness. This is attainable through the practice of pratyahara, dharana and dhyana.

Role of other yogas

Other aspects of yoga are also necessary to restore health. Shatkarmas and hatha yoga asanas are physical practices which lead to certain disciplines of the body. Pranayama is a physical practice which leads to a certain control over another dimension of one's personality. Ajapa japa, yoga nidra, antar mouna or any of the meditative techniques are actually practices. Karma yoga is not a practice. It is involvement, but an involvement with a realization. That realization comes after one has worked with the mind. Otherwise there won't be positive involvement.

It is the same with bhakti yoga, where the involvement comes when one has purified the feelings and emotions and channelled them in pratyahara, dharana and dhyana. Only when pratyahara, dharana and dhyana are established in life will one be able to practise bhakti. Similarly, only when pratyahara, dharana and dhyana are stabilized will one be able to practise jnana yoga and karma yoga.

In *bahiranga*, or exoteric yoga, only three yogas are mentioned: karma yoga representing involvement with actions, bhakti yoga representing involvement with feelings

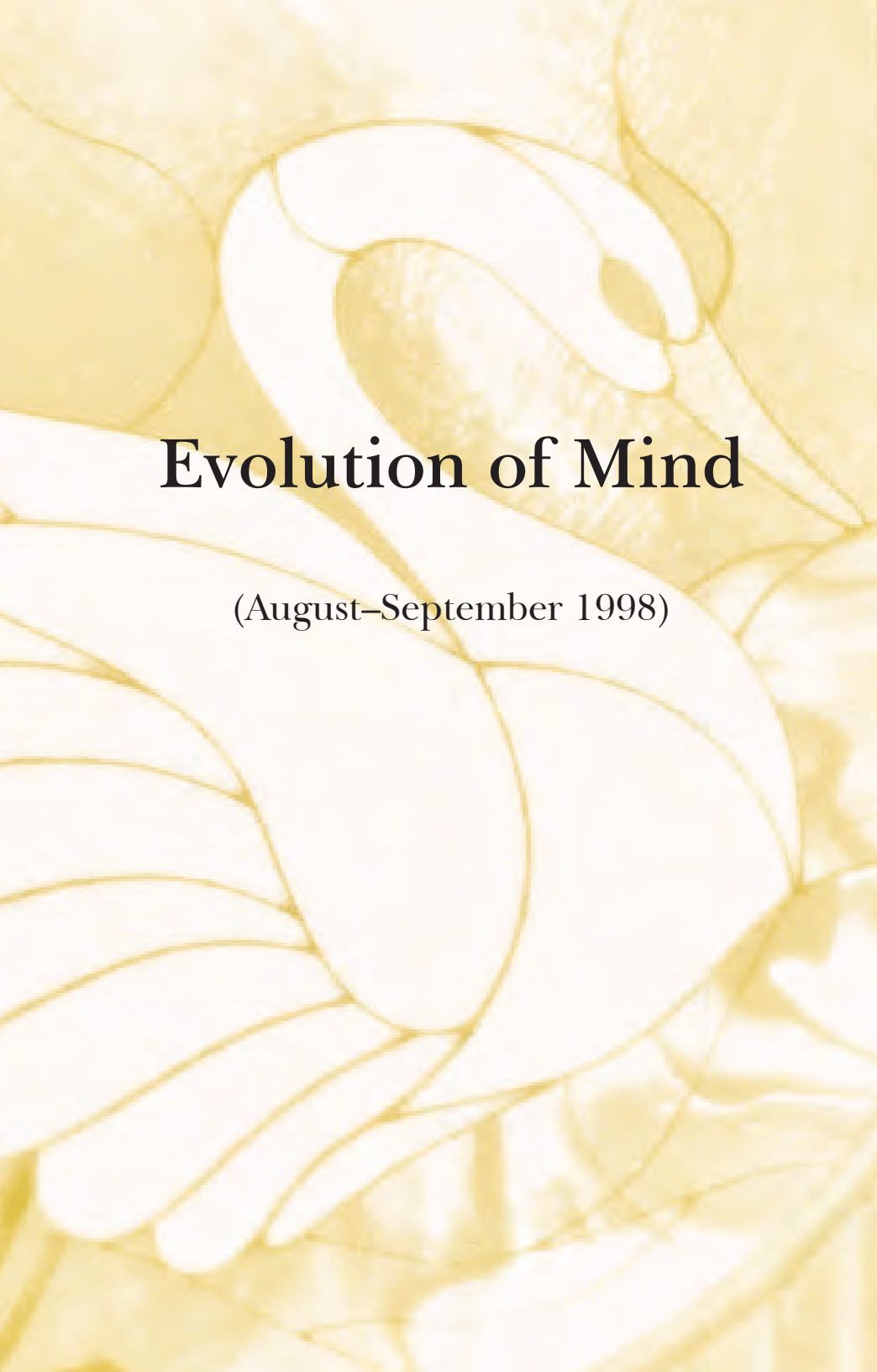
and emotions, attachments, attractions and repulsions, and jnana yoga representing the intellect, the involvement of logic with situations, conditions and one's environment. They represent the qualities of head, heart and hands. If there is proper balance, harmony, coordination and cooperation between the qualities of head, heart and hands, one is not subject to stress, tensions, conflicts and problems, and one is able to do everything effortlessly. This is the yogic attainment which one aspires for.

For the restoration of health one needs to look at the whole personality, not just the health of the physical or mental body. Apart from this one should also understand that there are two aspects of yoga. One is *antaranga*, the esoteric aspect of yoga, which is the sadhana-oriented approach. The other is the exoteric approach to yoga when yoga is becoming part of one's lifestyle, behaviour, attitude and performance. Hatha yoga or raja yoga, mantra yoga, kriya yoga and kundalini yoga, which require an amount of perfection, are esoteric yoga sadhana. They are part of a process in which one can involve oneself, which one can perform to gradually restore the balance of body, mind, emotions and feelings. One can restore the physical health and mental wellbeing. However, after having worked with one's self, the yogic attainment has to become a part and parcel of life. That is where exoteric yoga comes into force.

Exoteric yoga is actually classified into three categories. When yoga becomes part of the intellect, when the yogic attainment becomes part of knowledge, it is known as jnana yoga. When the attainments of yoga become part of one's feelings, attitudes, behaviour and emotions, it becomes bhakti yoga. When the attainments of yoga become a part of one's action, it becomes karma yoga. Therefore, in bhakti, karma or jnana yoga there is no sadhana involved as such. One does not sit down to meditate or practise asana and pranayama. Rather, it is a way of expressing the realization, the attainment which one has derived from the other esoteric practices of yoga.

Although certain guidelines have been given on the ideal way to practise karma yoga, bhakti yoga or jnana yoga, these guidelines represent the conditioning which one needs to create in order to allow the yogic attainments to manifest. The combination of the esoteric and exoteric represents the fulfilment and wholeness of yoga.





Evolution of Mind

(August–September 1998)

1

Superconsciousness and the Superconscious Mind

Our topic is superconsciousness and the superconscious mind. In order to understand both the relationship and the difference between the two, the understanding of mind and what is known of consciousness, needs to be revisited from a yogic perspective.

Here is an illustration of the concept. There is a huge body of water, an ocean. The composition of water is two parts hydrogen and one part oxygen. H_2O always remains the essence, or composition of water. If one cup of water is removed from the ocean, the essence of water remains the same, although it is now in two different places. If a pin is inserted and then removed from the cup of water, a droplet will be seen appearing at the tip of the pin. It is just a tiny drop, but the essence is H_2O . The essence never changes, whether the water is part of the ocean, contained in a cup, or is a drop on the tip of a needle. Only the descriptions change. The drop cannot be the ocean, nor can the drop be the water contained in the cup. They are identified differently, but the essence is the same in all three.

Consciousness

The descriptions of consciousness start from here because consciousness is the ocean. What is the essence of the ocean which is recognized as consciousness? The essence is AUM; this is the formula. Just as the formula for water, H_2O ,

represents two parts of hydrogen and one of oxygen, the full formula of consciousness, AUM represents omnipresence, omniscience and omnipotence.

Omniscience means containing knowledge, wisdom, experience and awareness of everything created and not created. Omnipotence means it has the potency to express itself in any form, not necessarily as decided by manifest beings, whether they be humans or insects, but the potency to express itself also in forms which are inconceivable. Omnipresence means that there is no absence of consciousness anywhere; it is always present. Whether it is realizable or not, whether it can be known and perceived or not is another matter, but it is present. This is the essence of the pure form of consciousness.

Due to the interaction of the twin forces of consciousness, known as Shiva or Purusha, and energy, known as Shakti or Prakriti, a new form of consciousness emerges. One needs a container, an external agent, to remove water from the ocean, whether it be a cup or a hand. It is only when two opposite objects come in contact with each other that separation occurs. If two similar objects come together there is fusion. If a bucket of water is thrown into the ocean, what happens? It will be impossible to separate the water of the bucket from the water of the ocean because they are of the same essence. Purusha and Prakriti are opposite agents: the male and female principles. When they interact, they generate a separate understanding, knowledge, perception and experience of forms.

This generation is known as creation, but creation is not only of the manifest dimension, it is also in the unmanifest dimension. Creation is not only physical; it is also invisible and subtle. When Purusha and Prakriti, or Shiva and Shakti, or Brahman and Maya come together, it means consciousness and energy come together and something new is generated which is limited and finite.

Levels of consciousness

According to yoga, the identity of the new creation which has come about is the realization of different structures or levels within consciousness. These are identified in yogic terminology as the states of jagrat, swapna, sushupti and turiya. The first is generally called jagrat, but when we speak of the process of creation, actually it is not the first, it is the fourth. Turiya is the first, sushupti is second, swapna is third, and jagrat is fourth, because from the original state of omnipresence, omniscience and omnipotence the first identifiable state of consciousness to emerge is turiya. *Turiya* represents these three faculties of omnipotence, omniscience and omnipresence, but it is contained within the structure of Prakriti. Beyond turiya is another state of pure consciousness, known in yogic terminology as *turiyatita*, meaning that it has absolutely no relation with Prakriti. In turiya the potency of consciousness is manifested in Prakriti.

After turiya, the next grosser manifestation is *sushupti* where the potency of consciousness is totally dissolved. It is the causal form, *karana sharira*. It is a dimension where time, space and object become totally still. If turiya is superconsciousness, sushupti is the unconscious. In that state of unconsciousness there is no concept of time, no concept of object and no concept of space. It is an experience which one has every day during *nidra*, sleep. When one wakes up one is aware of time, place and object, and the day seems a long day. But when one sleeps one does not know what is happening. One does not know how time passes, or the state, or condition of one's body. All the doors of perception have dissolved into nothingness. Similarly, the knowledge, potency and awareness of consciousness dissolve in the state of sushupti.

The third, more gross or material manifestation is called *swapna*, or the somnambulist state. It is the dreamlike state where one is aware of the subtle processes, perceptions, visions, ideas, thoughts, but they are not associated with the physical body, or with physical dynamism and movement. It

is an experience of the subtle dimension, the *sukshma sharira*. Sushupti is the dissolution of all perception and swapna is the regeneration of experiences, knowledge and awareness at the subtle level. Swapna is also within the framework of Prakriti, the manifestation at a more individual level.

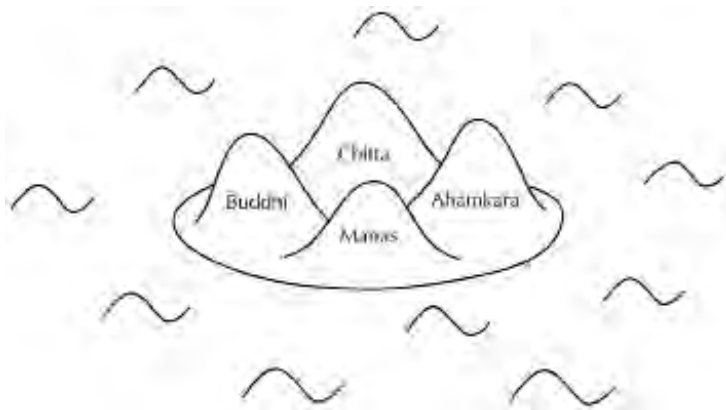
Jagrat is again more gross, and the associated consciousness is connected with the material, physical body. It is known as *jagriti*, in which there is awareness of the senses, the sense objects, the movements of the mind and the things that happen in the form of emotions, thoughts, desires, and so on.

The experience of consciousness moves from the transcendental to the material; from turiyatita, the primordial original state of being, to turiya, to sushupti, to swapna and to jagrat. Even in the state of jagrat, although energy is predominant, dynamic and active, there is still consciousness, which is known in yoga as *chetana*, the faculty of confined and manifest consciousness in the realm of jagriti. This chetana is the consciousness one deals with on a daily basis. *Chetana* equates with *jagriti*, the manifest consciousness which has the ability to identify with the body. Here the meaning of body is not the physical body, but the manifest personality.

Fourfold mind

It is chetana, in association with the jagriti state, which gives birth to another group of four experiences. The first one is *ahamkara*, or ego. The second is *chitta*, which is translated as memory, although it goes much deeper than memory. The third is *buddhi*, intellect, and the fourth is *manas*, the reflective mind. This group of four are known as the *manah chatushtaya*, the four forms of manifest consciousness. In yoga, these are the four faculties of the mind which become the foundation stones for one's growth, development, progress and evolution in life.

People are taught to use the intellect, buddhi, right from kindergarten, through school, university and beyond that. Chitta and ahamkara are activated from the time of



birth. Babies are taught to remember and identify with their associations of daily life. A small child cannot intellectually recognize its mother in a group of thirty people, but it can identify its mother through sound, or through some other connection, which it creates as a reference for memory. As one grows up, one associates memory with many more things. This continues right until the time of death.

The experience of ahamkara, ego, takes the form of concern with security, self-preservation, self-image and self-prestige. Even a child does not like to be shouted at in front of other people. Even when children are one or two years old they know, “I have an identity to preserve, I have my self-prestige, I have my self-image.” That is due to ahamkara. Ego is not arrogance, or a negative trait. Ego is a building block of life without which life cannot exist.

Manas is the reflective, or the brooding mind. It is continuously thinking, revolving around ideas, concepts, emotional feelings, or objects of desire. Cravings, *iccha* or *vasana*, initially begin at the level of manas. If one sees a nice flower, a handsome person, or a beautiful object one appreciates its beauty. Appreciation of beauty is one level of activity, but deep inside, with that appreciation comes the desire, “I wish I could have it, I wish I could possess it.” This starts with manas, associated with jagriti and chetana.

Fourfold mind and manas

Manah chatushtaya means the four aspects of the manifest mind. People speak of the lower mind and the higher mind. In fact, there are three minds, because 'higher mind' means the transcendental state where one is not affected by the activities of these four components of the manah chatushtaya. The 'intermediate mind' is the manah chatushtaya and the 'lower mind' is manas only.

Right now, one exists in the lower mind and is not simultaneously aware of what is happening at the level of buddhi, chitta and ahankara; one is reading and thinking at the level of reflective mind, manas. In a peaceful environment there is no reason to activate the ego, buddhi, or chitta.

However, if one is left somewhere in a jungle and has to live for fifteen days on survival training, one must find food and water while encountering unknown obstacles and animals. During those fifteen days, both fear and an inquisitive mental process would be experienced. One would be continuously observing the environment and looking at everything: trees, fruits, roots. One would not always be at ease with the environment, but confronting it. In this process, the four aspects of mind would come into play. Chitta would become involved as numerous memories surface, and one forces other memories to come up. Buddhi would become involved in helping chitta to identify whether this is edible or not, whether this water is potable or not. Ahankara would be involved in self-preservation. The entire mind becomes active when one confronts a challenging situation.

In a classroom situation the students know that they are making notes and can refer back to them at any time. The teacher has not come with notes. He receives the information from chitta. For the teacher it is a challenging environment: he has to look after his self-prestige! He can't become an idiot in front of the students, so the ego is also awake. He has to use his chitta, because he has spoken on this subject

many times before and has to remember what he said before, so that he does not contradict himself. He also has to use his buddhi to find the right method to express what he is trying to convey. And of course, he has to use his manas. Therefore, the teacher is the only person in the classroom who is firing all four guns, who is using the four components of manah chatushtaya, while the students are only firing one gun.

The concept of ‘supermind’ in yoga, is the awakening of these four faculties together, awakening the entire manah chatushtaya, so that there is no compartmentalization, no restriction and no limitation in the expression of these four items.

Chitta in the *Yoga Sutras*

In the second sloka of the *Yoga Sutras*, Sage Patanjali refers to the chitta (1:2):

Yogah chitta vritti nirodhah.

Yoga is managing / controlling / blocking the *vrittis* (modifications) of chitta.

However, here *chitta* refers to manah chatushtaya. Sage Patanjali has purposefully and specifically used the word chitta, but from a different perspective. According to Sage Patanjali, all one’s impressions are stored in consciousness, and the body dies with that information stored in consciousness. A new birth happens and it is still stored. When one takes a new physical body one acquires a new set of buddhi and a new set of manas according to the environment, cultural education, social customs and upbringing. One acquires a new mental set, but the old impressions are retained and they become the samskaras, the karmas, and the *swabhava*, one’s own nature. The entire group is seen by Sage Patanjali as nothing but a continuation of memories from one life to another, therefore he refers to *chitta vritti nirodhah*, cleaning the impressions in chitta. The next sutra says (1:3):

Tadah drashthu svaroope avasthaanam.

Then one becomes the seer, the *drashta*.

When one has control over the chitta vrittis, meaning the four aspects of one's present life, one becomes the seer, the *drashta*. The *drashta*, the seer, witness, observer is the superconscious mind; the supermind is not superconsciousness. We must retain that perspective when we say that the supermind indicates awakening and harmonization of these four items of the manah chatushtaya.

There are two main thrusts in yoga. One is to realize the supermind and the other is to realize superconsciousness. Supermind indicates harmony in mental expressions and experiences so that they are not tainted by the gunas of rajas, tamas and sattwa. Realization of the essence of consciousness and connecting with that subtle consciousness from this gross level is the concept of superconsciousness, or the 'higher mind'.

In regard to consciousness, the top level is turiyatita, the pure consciousness unaffected by Prakriti. Turiya is where Prakriti becomes involved and gives a particular shape, or the *ahamkara* dimension. Here, consciousness has to function and perform its activities. The hold of Prakriti intensifies until, in jagriti, the entire perception of consciousness is diverted to the manifest dimension.

This has been explained by the yogis in the form of different bodies, or dimensions of experience. Jagriti has been associated with the *sthoola sharira*, the gross body, associating itself with the senses, the five sense organs of action, *karmendriyas*, and the five organs of perception, *jnanendriyas*. The swapna, or 'dream' state is associated with the subtle internalized dimension, the *sukshma sharira*. Sushupti is where everything dissolves into nothingness. It is the area where the experiences of the higher realm or higher dimension are not allowed to percolate down into the lower dimension. Sushupti or sleep is also the state from where nothing rises from the lower dimension. It is like the

baseline; everything dissolves in sushupti. Sushupti is the *karana sharira*, the causal body.

The concept of supermind applies to uniting these dimensions of life. The concept of superconsciousness is related to attaining the turiyatita state.

The following chart will summarize the concepts given in this lecture:

SUPERCONSCIOUSNESS – Chit	
<i>Turiyatita</i>	
Mind	Consciousness
Ahamkara	1. <i>Turiya</i>
Chitta	2. <i>Sushupti</i> – <i>karana sharira</i> (causal body)
Buddhi	3. <i>Swapna</i> – <i>sukshma sharira</i> (subtle body)
Manas + Jnanendriya + Karmendriya	4. <i>Jagrat</i> – <i>sthoola sharira</i> (gross body)

2

Self-Realization and Self-Awareness

Although it is difficult to have a demarcation between consciousness and mind, this demarcation has been created because it is related to the experiences one gains in the course of life and the process of total involvement of the human personality. In the course of one's life the mind is a hundred percent involved with the world. The mind is associating itself with senses, sense objects, time and space. The impressions, *samskaras*, which have been received by these agencies in the span of one's life are retained and transferred to the broader field of consciousness in the form of impressions, or archetypes.

At the end of life the person dies. The body dies and interaction of mind with the world, with the senses, objects, time and space stops, but the impressions have been carried from the senses and manas to chitta and beyond: from the bottom of the chart to the top of the chart. Those impressions are retained and when the opportunity is right for having a new body again, a new birth happens.

The impressions, which are contained in the field of consciousness of one's being, percolate to the mind's level in *bindu*, drops. Those drops can be identified as archetypes, *samskaras*, as karma and as *swabhava*, one's nature.

Influence of gunas

There is another level involved, which is the three gunas: *sattwaguna*, the pure nature; *rajoguna*, the dynamic, interactive

nature; and *tamoguna*, the stagnant, unchanging nature. Manas, buddhi, chitta and ahamkara are illuminated by the light of these gunas. Depending on which guna is predominant, these four aspects of mind express themselves.

It is like covering a bulb with red transparent plastic. The light doesn't change, but what one perceives now is illuminated by red light and everything looks red. If the cover is changed to a blue polythene film, everything is seen as blue. When the cover is removed, there is just plain light and everything is seen illuminated in its original colour. The gunas are the veils, or curtains of Prakriti and according to them, one's perception of the world, the nature of one's personality, the responses and reactions of the mind are coloured.

It is for this reason that one finds people of different mentalities in the world. Some are simple, innocent, tranquil, harmonious and pure, representing the influence of sattwa. Some people are dynamic, active, creative, always doing something, brilliant and bright, representing rajas. Some people like to lead a laidback, easy-going life, nothing bothers them, no timetable can make them hurry, no anxiety can make them move, that is the predominance of tamas.

Each guna can have a positive expression, or a negative expression. This is not going to be discussed in depth now, but positive and negative expressions are identified as *ahimsa* and *himsa*, non-violence and violence; *satya* and *asatya*, truth and untruth; *shuddha* and *ashuddha*, pure and impure. We can classify them as right and wrong, but like day and night, they are two poles, or expressions of the gunas.

Consciousness beyond the gunas

Although the gunas play an important role in determining the expression, nature and effort of one's personality, when it comes to the awareness of consciousness, the gunas play no role.

Meditation is an example. When one meditates, one might be hyperactive, or hypoactive. Whether one is dis-

turbed or at peace with oneself makes no difference, because the process of meditation involves separating the tranquillity of the self from the external, superficial movements of mind.

The moment one is able to remove the tranquillity of the self from the movement of the mind and *vrittis*, the *gunas* become insignificant. When one confronts a situation in which one associates with the responses and reactions of the mind, the *gunas* become predominant. If one performs an activity where one focuses on centring, harmonizing and concentrating oneself, the *gunas* are sidestepped.

Consciousness in the Upanishads

The Upanishads are instructions given by seers and sages to their disciples. They have talked of the mind as *manah chatushtaya*, the fourfold mind, or *antahkarana*, the inner tool or cause. *Antah* means inner and *karana* means cause. The cause of all impressions and experiences received by the individual self is *antahkarana*. *Antahkarana* and *manah chatushtaya* are the two terms which seers used when they discussed the human mind in relation to its natural evolution, or in relation to spiritual realizations.

Similarly, the seers and sages have given two names to the common daily state of consciousness, which is interacting with the manifest dimension: *jagriti* and *vaishvanara*. *Vishva* means universe and *nara* is the decaying principle. *Vaishvanara* means consciousness associated totally with *prakriti* and, in the course of interaction, going through changes, transformations, growth and progression.

Similarly, *swapna* has also been named *tejas*. *Tejas* means luminosity. When the disassociation of consciousness from the ten senses, the five *karmendriyas*, the organs of action, and five *jnanendriyas*, the organs of knowledge, takes place, the body stops functioning. Consciousness stops receiving information from the physical, gross body, but the mind is active and becomes the source of information. Blind people, for example, can't see, but still have concepts of the objects that surround them. They can identify objects, they 'see' with

the inner mind. Some people think that blind people cannot perceive colours, but often they do perceive colours and can identify colours. Often they dream in colours, not in black and white as many people may think. If they are not able to see with the physical eyes, and they have never seen colours with their physical eyes, what is it that has given them the understanding of objects and colours? It is the luminosity of the mind which is known as *tejas*.

The third state of sushupti is associated with prajna. It is the state of consciousness where the ideas of time, space and object dissolve completely, yet awareness, knowledge and wisdom remain. It is this wisdom aspect which is known as *prajna*. A person who has this knowledge, understanding and wisdom has prajna.

The fourth state is *turiya* and is associated with *atma* as the witness. The fifth, *turiyatita*, meaning beyond the transcendental state of *turiya*, is sometimes called *gunatita*, 'the state beyond the gunas'.

Self-awareness

The concepts of self-awareness and self-realization are two different ideas as self-awareness relates to the mind and self-realization relates to consciousness. These are two distinct processes in yoga.

In the early stages of yoga practice, instructions are continuously given to become aware, but aware of what? Aware of everything that is happening within the realm of physical, mental and psychic experiences. Awareness is an attribute of the mind, a quality of the mind, which can be cultivated.

In order to cultivate awareness, one has to train the mind. Right now the awareness is actually isolated. When one is working with manas, the focus is more on the activities of manas. When one is working with buddhi, the focus is there. When one is working with chitta, the focus is there. When one is working with ahamkara, the focus is there. It means that the awareness at present is compartmentalized. One

simply becomes aware of the most predominant functions of life, nothing more than that.

There are many people in the world who are surprised when asked to become aware of their breathing process. When told to observe the breath they say, “How do I do that?” They do not have the concept that they are breathing in and out, twenty-four hours of the day. That means the awareness has never focused itself on the process of breathing. This simply indicates that what is known as ‘awareness’, confirmation by the mind of a process or experience, doesn’t exist uniformly in everyone. The concept of self-awareness is becoming aware of the totality of involvement, interaction, perception, process and activity in each level of *manah chatushtaya*. Once awareness has spread throughout *manah chatushtaya*, and it is not compartmentalized, one begins to work at the level of consciousness.

Prerequisites for realization

How does one train oneself to be able to realize consciousness? What are the requirements to bring the mind to its full potential? The first requirement is *shanti*, peace, where the entire *antahkarana* is at ease with itself. Peace is a loaded word, because if the mind is running haywire there is no peace. If one is caught in the current of a *vritti*, the expression of an emotion, a desire, there is no peace. Peace means absolute harmony and tranquillity of mind.

Awareness leads to peace. It is its final outcome. Peace is the first and foremost requirement if one wants to transcend the mind in order to use the faculties of consciousness. When one attains peace the expressions of the mind are stabilized and harmonized, alignment of the mental energies takes place, the *gunas* become balanced and disturbances are totally eliminated. With peace comes the understanding of contentment, *santosha*. There is no craving left in the mind. Contentment is a natural outcome of peace, where the mind is free from craving, whether the craving pertains to *manas*,

buddhi, chitta, or ahamkara. The state of being insecure and the identification with body and sense objects is overcome.

It is with these two qualities of shanti and santosha that a state is generated, which is known as sanyam. In the final state, *sanyam* means to be the master, controller, or regulator of the mind. Everything becomes regulated by the states of santosha and shanti and one becomes the master of oneself and nothing escapes one's attention. Here sanyam does not mean restraint, rather the attainment of the state of sanyam, after attaining shanti and santosha, is the culmination of self-awareness.

Self-awareness deals with the expressions of the mind and personality in relation to the senses, sense objects and the material, manifest world. When one moves from self-awareness to realization, the experiences change and they become more internal. They are not associated with the senses or sense objects, but they are associated with the deeper structure of one's individual psyche.

Realization and self-realization

The word realization is in two categories. The concept of normal realization is from jagriti to sushupti; self-realization is from turiya to turiyatita.

Realization is not a permanent state, it is just a flash in which one knows of the place and experience at one particular time. In that flash of realization one is able to see the whole picture and not just a part of the picture. The term realization, associated with the states of jagriti, swapna and sushupti, represents the expansion of perception in the gross dimension. If one becomes aware of the nature of the mind, the emotional structure, behaviour and responses, ambitions, aspirations and desires, and if one is able to manage and channel them, it alters the personality, responses, behaviour and attitude.

Understanding the process of body and mind is realization; understanding the process of spirit is self-realization. In the state of realization, which happens at the

level of jagrat, swapna and sushupti, one is aware of oneself as an individual, but in the state of self-realization, extending into turiya and turiyatita, one merges the individual consciousness with the cosmic consciousness. There is no question of identifying oneself as Mr X or Mrs Y. That identity is completely lost; one becomes one with the cosmic consciousness in self-realization.

At the level of realization one works with jagrat, swapna and sushupti, or in modern terminologies with the conscious, subconscious and unconscious. In realization nothing remains unknown, whether it is an unconscious, subconscious, or conscious activity. A light in the room at night illuminates the entire room, not only one specific part of the room. Similarly, in the state of realization, the entire subtle personality comprised of the conscious, unconscious and subconscious is illuminated and there is no division or barrier at all.

Right now, there is a total lack of understanding of the processes of the unconscious and subconscious, and only some practical understanding of the conscious in relation to the body and mind. With realization, the conscious, subconscious and unconscious are seen as one consciousness, without any division, without any barrier. Becoming free of this barrier is becoming free of the concept of you and me, the concept of duality.

Self-realization

The moment duality falls away one enters into the turiya state, where the connection is made between the individual consciousness and the omniscient, omnipresent, omnipotent consciousness, free from the fetters of *maya*, illusion, and the bondages of *avidya*, ignorance.

Understanding the process of the spirit is termed self-realization, or spiritual realization. Therefore, it is said in yoga that self-realization is not a permanent, fixed and defined state, but a progressive state of consciousness. It is a progressive state of knowing and understanding. It is an evolving state.

In the turiya state the connection is made between the individual and the cosmic self. One recognizes the qualities of AUM, and realizes the essence of one's being. After realizing the essence of one's being, the cosmic energy begins to manifest in physical form. The physical form simply dissolves with the cosmic atoms and one becomes an enlightened being, one becomes a siddha. That is the concept of self-realization.



3

Dimensions of Mental Steadiness

So far, the mind, antahkarana or manah chatushtaya, has been discussed as a composition of *ahamkara*, which is the ego or the individual identity, *chitta* which we are here translating as memory, *buddhi* which is intelligence or intellect, and *manas*, the reflective ability.

How does one approach mental steadiness and the mind? What are the techniques used to provide steadiness? What are the different areas where one needs to become firm, stable and steady? What are thoughts, emotions, feelings or desires? What is identified as greed, illusion, anger and passion?

Four basic desires of the personality

These different attributes or expressions of the mind stem from four definite imprints, which guide our actions and motivations and become the foundation stones of our personality. Desire for progeny, money, pleasure and recognition are the four building blocks of personality, which are known as:

1. *putreshana*, desire for progeny
2. *vitteshana*, desire for social security
3. *bhogeshana*, desire for pleasure
4. *lokeshana*, desire for recognition.

The expressions of the mind in the form of vrittis, thoughts, ambitions, emotions, feelings, jealousies, head-

trips, anger, frustrations, love, affection and compassion stem from these four building blocks. These four *eshanas*, desires or wishes, are the cause of the vrittis that the *Yoga Sutras* speak about.

Their meaning depends on who is talking. A family person would naturally want the tradition, the lineage, to carry on. Even a sannyasin would naturally want his teachings to be carried forward by people who understand them, whether they are disciples or associates. The need to have somebody to follow one, who understands and can carry forward one's ideas, is putreshana.

Putreshana is the cause of the vritti which desires security from society, *vitteshana*. Whether one is a recluse, or a person involved in society, one has some basic requirements which need to be fulfilled. Security means having enough to eat. If one does not have even two chapattis to eat during the day that becomes a cause of tension and generates a vritti. In the life of any individual, vitteshana grows with responsibilities. As this desire matures, the thoughts and aspirations associated with this particular state are recognized as vrittis.

The third building block is *bhogeshana*, the search for pleasure. We all want to experience pleasure, and the search for pleasure can take any form. There are people, in fact the majority, who seek pleasure in and for the body. The senses seek pleasure, the eyes, the tongue, the nose wishes to smell something pleasant, the skin wishes to touch something pleasant. The body, as a whole, wishes to experience something which is pleasant, and the same process happens in the mind. The mind creates a desire to look for that which can give pleasure, and it is in this search for pleasure, contentment and happiness that one spends one's time.

The fourth building block is *lokeshana*, recognition. Everybody wants to be recognized no matter how they are, or who they are.

The following chart gives a broad classification, which raises maybe hundreds of questions about the four imprints as foundations of the personality, and as the cause of vrittis:

1. <i>Putreshana</i> (progeny)	is connected with	manas
2. <i>Vitteshana</i> (money/security)	is connected with	buddhi
3. <i>Bhogeshana</i> (pleasure)	is connected with	chitta
4. <i>Lokeshana</i> (recognition)	is connected with	ahamkara

We see that recognition is connected with ahamkara. Pleasure, the experience which everyone seeks, remembers, cherishes and holds close to oneself, is associated with chitta. Money, or security, is associated with buddhi, for one uses the intellect continuously to find stability and security in life. Progeny is connected with manas, as it is something that one reflects about continuously. People continuously think about children, girlfriends and boyfriends and who would be a good companion.

These are the causes of vrittis. The expression of the eshanas has to be balanced. The expression and intensity of desires has to be harmonized. Once the desires are harmonized concentration is attained.

Three levels of desire

Desires are divided into three groups. The first group of desires is known as *iccha* which is often translated as will, but that is not a correct or accurate translation. *iccha* is the first level of desire, the plain and simple thought that comes to mind. “I wish to have a cool drink,” is a simple *iccha*, it comes and goes. “I wish to eat pizza, and a nice tasty rasagulla,” is a simple *iccha*, it comes and goes. All such thoughts which contain little forms of desire are filtered in the mind, and if one brushes off this first level of desire, nothing happens, one is at peace. However, if that desire becomes deep-rooted, it is known as *kaamana*, the second level of desire and craving. One thinks about the same thing not just once but five, six, seven times. That thought is a bit harder to get rid of. It keeps on nagging at the back of the mind. The third level of desire is known as *vasana* or obsessive desire. No matter where one is, what one does, it remains and doesn’t let go of its hold.

Desire is the root cause of creation. In the Upanishads there is a story. Once upon a time, God suddenly woke up to the fact that He was all alone with nobody to keep Him company. God thought to Himself, “I am One, let Me become many.” ‘Let me become many’ is the seed of desire. With this resolution or *sankalpa* of God, creation resulted and we are the result. Due to desire, creation and life have come forth. Everyone is subject to desire, whether consciously or unconsciously. Animals such as birds and reptiles which do not have buddhi, the rational consciousness, move because of their desire. Desire is the biggest *vritti*, the biggest modification.

In yoga, different techniques are taught which help the mind attain stability, stop its flirtations with sense objects and attain *shanti*, peace, *santosha*, contentment, and *sanyam*, restraint. They are classified in three groups: pratyahara, dharana and dhyana. People in general consider meditation to be the panacea for all ills. Whatever little practice of closing the eyes and observing themselves they do, they call it meditation or *dhyana*. But meditation is a difficult process to achieve and the actual preparation, the actual training to attain mental steadiness begins not with dhyana but with pratyahara.

Stages of pratyahara

Pratyahara has been defined as the withdrawal of senses. In one way this is true, but there is another meaning of the word pratyahara. Right now the mind is fed by the information which comes from outside, the world of senses and sense objects. The mind is associated with the surrounding world and environment. *Pratyahara* is isolation of the mind from the senses and the connection of the mind with the inner self: isolating the mind from the external, and connecting it with the internal. Pratyahara is practised in the following stages:

Stage 1: The first technique of pratyahara is known as *kaya sthairyam*, which means steadiness of the body. People

associate the concept of body with the physical body, *kaya*, but from the yogic perspective it includes the personality and not only the physical body. Personality includes the senses and the mind; the entire individual personality is to be recognized by the word *kaya*. *Sthairyam* means stillness. This first technique of pratyahara must be perfected before any attempt is made to practise other techniques or meditations. The practice begins with awareness of the body and trying to still the movements of the body.

Stage 2: One tries to develop the ability to become absolutely still for an extended period of time, whether it is five minutes or five hours. If one can still the body, one also has the ability to stop the fluctuations of the mind. This is the basic idea behind *kaya sthairyam*. The body, mind and personality become activated when they have to adjust and adapt to the surrounding environment or conditions. Suppose someone goes to your room, opens the door and throws a bucket of water on the bed. Who would be sitting happily and peacefully? Peace or stability is attained when one has adapted or adjusted oneself to the present environment, to which the entire personality is being exposed. This is what *kaya sthairyam* attempts.

The purpose of asana is *sthiram sukham asanam*, steadiness and comfort in a posture. This is the definition of asana given in the *Yoga Sutras* (2:46). Just as asana prepares the body for perfection of pratyahara, so does pranayama. Therefore, pranayamas as preparatory practices for pratyahara cannot be ignored. One cannot go straight into the practice of pratyahara, one has to start with gradual adjustment of the body and breath, and preparatory practices for gradual harmonization between the body and mind.

One cannot expect harmony to happen instantaneously, and this is one important point which people all over the world have missed. They think that meditation is a final, ultimate and powerful tool, and they ignore asana and pranayama. They sit down for meditation, practise it for many years, but still they are in the same square they started

from; nothing changes in their life. However, if one follows the sequence which has been described in yoga, definitely, heads can be held high with hopes soaring.

Stage 3: In the practice of pratyahara the span of mental attention has to be increased and one has to increase the area of one's awareness of perception. Awareness has to be associated with one's perceptions. What is one experiencing physically through the senses? What do the senses perceive? The component of awareness has to be added to sensory perceptions.

Stage 4: One has to extend the attention outside, not withdraw it. One has to find out how the senses are working, what responses and information they are transmitting to the mind, and how the mind is responding to the transmission of the senses. There has to be complete identification between the senses and mind.

Stage 5: Once this merging has been obtained, in the second phase, one blocks out the external inputs and holds the mind steady.

As preparation, stillness is the primary aim in pratyahara; secondly, extending the span of attention; third, merging the awareness with attention; fourth, extending the perceptions outside. And fifth is blocking perceptions and external inputs and holding the mind still.

Two phases of pratyahara

In the first phase of pratyahara, when one is becoming aware of the interactions between the senses and the mind, the mind as the different compartments of *manah chatushtaya*, one has to observe the sensorial experiences as well as the mental experiences in the form of thoughts. In the practice of inner silence, *antar mouna*, for example, one observes each thought and gains the ability to go to the source of each thought. In the second phase one gains the ability to stop the flow of thoughts at will and to come to a thoughtless state of mind.

Other examples of pratyahara techniques are *ajapa japa* and *yoga nidra*. In *ajapa japa*, continuous repetition of a

mantra, one joins the awareness with the natural process of breath. Breath is a normal, natural, continuous process, but in *ajapa japa* one joins the component known as awareness with the breathing process. In *yoga nidra*, yogic sleep, one wilfully, purposefully becomes aware of each and every part of the body and consciously generates different physical experiences of the body such as lightness and heaviness, cold and heat. In the mental dimension of *yoga nidra*, one stimulates the *chitta* through the process of visualizations by bringing out impressions from the memory. These are some of the practices of *pratyahara* which help balance the agitations and the normal unconscious activities of the extroverted senses and mind.

Dharana: holding on

The next aspect is *dharana*, which means concentration, or to hold something firmly. One holds the isolated state of mind. One holds the mind disconnected from the senses and the outer world, and does not allow it to connect with the senses and sense objects. It is maintaining the status quo after perfecting *pratyahara*; emptiness of the mind. By internalizing the awareness one becomes aware of the subtle expressions of the mind in the realm of *ahamkara*, *chitta*, *buddhi* and *manas*.

The instincts are also harmonized and balanced. There are four basic instincts of life: *ahara*, related to the ingestion of food; *nidra*, the need to let go, sleep and relax; *bhaya*, the natural fears; and *maithuna*, the desire for procreation. These instincts are unconscious and in the process of *dharana* they have to be managed. There are three categories of *dharana* techniques: i) to manage the basic instincts, ii) to improve concentration and iii) to fix the attention.

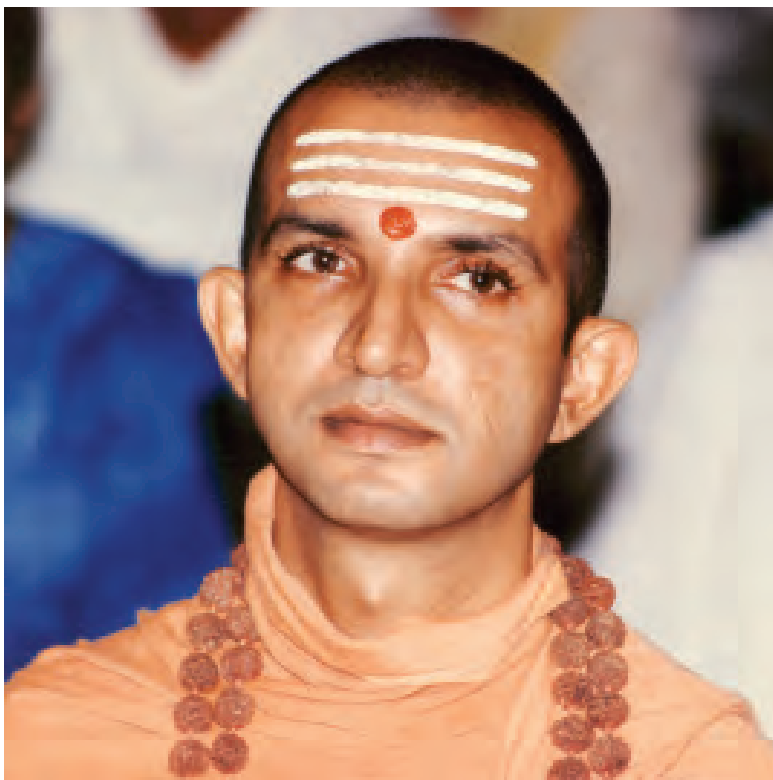
The human personality is instinctive, emotional and intellectual. The instinctive dimension of the personality is managed through techniques belonging to *daharakasha dharana*. *Hridayakasha dharana* manages the emotional personality, and *chidakasha dharana* tranquillizes, harmonizes,

balances and concentrates the intellectual personality. Only when these three levels of personality are properly integrated does meditation begin.

Two phases of dhyana

Meditation or *dhyana* is of two kinds: *sakara*, with form, and *nirakara*, formless. The sakara dhyana is used to overcome the influences of duality and the mind. Nirakara dhyana is used to access the dimension of consciousness and, within that, to progress from jagriti to turiya.

The pratyahara, dharana and dhyana techniques flow into one another and are simply extensions of different aspects or dimensions of mental steadiness.



4

Sthitaprajna: State of Steady Wisdom

Attaining levels of steadiness and stability, *stitha*, begins with the senses. Instead of working directly with the mind, the practitioner is first taught to work with the senses and to balance the agitations in the mind which are the result of sensory involvement. Steadiness of the senses is the first achievement of pratyahara.

The next level of stability is within the mind itself. In relation to the mind one begins to observe and harmonize the most dominant activity which one experiences in the form of thoughts. Steadiness of thought is the second stage of stability.

The third stage deals with emotions. People find it difficult to control and channel the expression of emotions. At the time of an emotional outburst there is little rational conscious control. Only after the explosion is over, when one reflects on what happened, does one realize that it was a reaction. Emotions always create change in the normal pattern of the mind and this alteration of the normal mental state is experienced in the form of stimulation. When one thinks negatively about somebody the thoughts come and go, but when one *reacts* it is a shock, and that shock forces one to reflect and justify one's reaction. If one is unable to justify the reaction, one sees this as a weakness. However, if one is able to justify the reaction, one does not see the weakness, rather one sees an affirmation of one's concepts and ideas.

In the third level of mental steadiness, the most difficult emotions and reactions are linked with the ego principle. Just as thoughts are associated with buddhi and the intellectual process, emotions are associated with ahamkara. Since one does not have a clear concept of how the ego functions and manifests, one is unable to understand many of the emotional explosions and goes through personality crises because of that lack of understanding.

Three groups of dharana techniques

Dharana is a good system for managing emotions. Although the process of calming the agitations begins in pratyahara with techniques giving insight, *antar darshan*, the actual management of emotion, happens in dharana. Emotions are linked with instincts. Emotions are associated with the subtle personality, *sukshma sharira*. Emotions are linked with ego. Therefore, in the practices of dharana there are three distinct groups of techniques.

1. *Daharakasha dharana* helps to manage emotions which are associated with instincts.

2. *Hridayakasha dharana* helps to manage emotional upheavals or disturbances which arise out of the natural expressions or morals. One may think that good morality is to be a loving, kind and gentle person because it fits one's concept of morality. One may want to be compassionate because it fits a concept of morality. When something happens which changes that concept, fear, aggression or insecurity come up, and that happens at the level of hridayakasha.

3. *Chidakasha dharana* manages emotions which are part of one's nature and personality and which have been carried forward. Chidakasha dharana has many functions. One is to streamline the intellectual process, the information which is received through buddhi. Another is to streamline the experiences coming from the depths of the personality, the ego dimension. The so-called psychic expressions or experiences arise in chidakasha. Of the three dimensions, chidakasha is possibly the most visible and potent.

Dharana helps to streamline the activities of instincts, emotions and ego. Once this is attained, calmness occurs and the mind becomes fixed on one experience, one identity, one idea, object or thought. From this point onwards dhyana, meditation, begins.

Dhyana: attaining prajna

Meditation is used to access the different dimensions of consciousness by the following two kinds of meditation: *sakara*, focusing on a manifest experience, form, image or idea, and *nirakara*, focusing on a universal idea. Meditation becomes the launching pad for the gross awareness to merge with the cosmic awareness. The outcome of this harmony is known as *sthitaprajna*: *sthita* means stable, *prajna* means wisdom.

This particular word 'prajna' is used to denote the state of mental balance and harmony. It is believed that everything is a play of knowledge and ignorance, *vidya* and *avidya*. If the knowing is clear, if the knowing is experiential, the more one knows the more one becomes free of ignorance. If knowledge is not clear and if the knowing is not experiential, the more one knows the more one enters into ignorance, which is a peculiar state.

If one's knowledge is clear, is lived and experienced, the more one knows the higher one can reach. Avidya will be eradicated, ignorance removed. However, if knowing is the cause of confusion and conflict, and if one can't live what one knows, it is simply a type of mental gymnastics, and it leads to more ignorance. It is in this situation that people have stated that ignorance is better than knowledge. If one is confused one is falling into a bigger trap, it is better not to know and remain happy and free from conflict.

In the yogic concept, the entire process of life or the entire process of evolution is seen in the following form:

1. *Jnata*: the knower
2. *Jneya*: what can be known
3. *Jnana*: knowledge.

In this world and creation, individuals are striving to know and to have *jnana*. The moment one creates an association, a link, a connection with knowledge, one becomes the knower, *jnata*. As one realizes, “Okay, I have known this,” suddenly one becomes aware that there is something more to be discovered. One becomes aware of *jneya*, something more which has to be known. If one knows A, one is looking forward to knowing B. When one knows B, one is looking forward to knowing C. One’s entire life is seen as a process of knowing which keeps building on itself, a knowledge, *jnana*, which is continuously progressing and evolving.

Even in relation to human expression, the systems of *pratyahara*, *dharana* and *dhyana* aim at knowing action and reaction. If one observes the senses, one realizes how they function and how they associate. If one observes one’s thoughts and emotions, one knows about them and their details. The whole process is of knowing, but this knowing is not confined to an intellectual experience only, rather it is experienced knowing. Experienced or experiential knowing is called *prajna*. *Jna* is the Sanskrit root meaning knowledge, when the prefix *pra* is added it means with more intensity, conviction, determination and involvement.

The moment one begins to be involved, to link and connect oneself more with an intellectual concept, it becomes part of oneself. Even if it is an intellectual process, once it becomes part of one’s expressions, that will be realized as *prajna*. It has to become part of the natural human expression. *Prajna* distinguishes between that which is *nitya*, eternal truth, and that which is *anitya*, changeable.

Samadhi: sthitaprajna

Sthitaprajna means stable wisdom. It is the outcome of awareness plus knowledge of action and reaction, plus memories which are there in the form of *samskaras* and *karmas*, plus nature. This entire expression in harmony is *sthitaprajna*. This state of *sthitaprajna* has been described

in the second chapter of the *Bhagavad Gita*, verse fifty-five onwards, as a state where one is not subject to the plays of the intellect. There is no confusion, no conflict about what is right and what is wrong, everything is clear. There is no need to reflect. Reflection happens when one is unsure, but when one is sure, at that level of realization when one uses wisdom, there is only knowledge, not reflection or thinking about the situation. That is one of the highlights of the sthitaprajna state which can be observed in people who have attained that level.

Clarity of speech, thought, action, performance, optimism and positivity are the symptoms of a person who has attained the sthitaprajna stage. This is an important connection to make. In the *Bhagavad Gita* (2:55), Lord Krishna says:

*Prajahaati yadaa kaamaan sarvaan paartha manogataan;
Aatmanyevaatmanaa tushtah sthitaprajnastadochyate.*

When a man completely casts off, O Arjuna, all the desires of the mind and is satisfied in the Self by the Self, then is he said to be one of steady wisdom.

Prajahaati means ‘leaves the senses and desires’; when one leaves behind all one’s intentions and is satisfied by the Self, one attains sthitaprajna. This is the description which Sri Krishna gives to Arjuna and this idea has to be understood properly. This realization comes in sthitaprajna. Stable wisdom comes when there is realization of a higher reality.

Non-attachment

Non-attachment means one leaves the personal association with objects and the desires or attachments associated with them; one leaves the involvement with craving, the desire for pleasure and satisfaction which are the normal conditions and nature of the human personality. By stopping or controlling the flirtatious nature of the mind, one attains the state of sthitaprajna. This is the key to transcending earthly, gross consciousness and establishing oneself in higher consciousness.

It has been described in the *Bhagavad Gita* (2:58) that just as a tortoise stretches its limbs outside and can also withdraw them again, eventually one has the ability to interact in the world, and when the time comes, one also has the ability to withdraw from the world.

*Yadaa samharate chaayam koormo'ngaaneeva sarvashah;
Indriyaaneendriyaarthebhyah-tasya prajnaa pratishthitaa.*

When, like the tortoise which withdraws its limbs from all sides, one withdraws one's senses from the sense objects, then one's wisdom becomes steady.

When one leaves the room, one turns off the fans and lights as one is not going to use them, and when one comes into the room, according to need, one turns on the light or fan. It is this same ability which an individual must develop. The problem arises when one keeps the switches on all the time, whether they will be used or not. For example, even when a person is in one place, the mind is connected to some other place, disassociation does not take place and it causes suffering and pain, and the memories become more intense. Not only memory, but associations become more intense.

Sometimes one feels as if the switches are off, but when there are provocations and attractions, one slips back or reverts to those situations. If the switch is really off, even if 1,000 KV of current is put through the wire, the fan is not going to run. If one can be provoked, although one thought that the switch was off, it was not! The state of sthitaprajna denotes this particular aspect of human life: having the ability to disconnect, to switch off objects, situations, understandings, realizations and experiences which are not needed at present.

In one's own mind, if the association between the senses and oneself is observed, if the association between the thoughts, emotions, feelings, desires and oneself is observed, if the association between the samskaras, karmas and oneself

is observed, one suddenly realizes that one has been carrying a lot of unnecessary luggage and it has not allowed one to be stable. Therefore, most of the saints and the techniques or principles of spiritual life have emphasized the need to reduce attachment. The *Bhagavad Gita* (2:56–57) describes sthitaprajna:

*Dukkheshvanudrignamanaah sukheshu vigatasprihah;
Veetaraagabhayakrodhah sthitadheermuniruchyate.*

*Yah sarvatraanabhisnehah-tat-tatpraapya shubhaashubam;
Naabhinandati na dveshti tasya prajnaa pratishthitaa.*

He whose mind is not shaken by adversity, who does not hanker after pleasures, and is free from attachment, fear and anger, is called a sage of steady wisdom. (56)

He who is everywhere without attachment, on meeting with anything good or bad, who neither rejoices nor hates, his wisdom is fixed. (57)

When a person is free from enjoying external objects and is also free from vasanas connected to those objects, that person has attained non-attachment to external as well as internal objects. Being oblivious to the desires for enjoyment is a state which is obtained by stable wisdom, and dualities such as *sukha*, happiness, and *dukha*, suffering, are transcended. The person rises above dualities, and desires enter into the human consciousness just as rivers enter into the ocean. The *Bhagavad Gita* (2:70) explains that desires arise, but they do not disturb the personality.

*Aapooryamaanamachalapratishtham
Samudramaapah pravishanti yadvat;
Tadvatkaamaa yam pravishanti sarve
Sa shaantimaapnoti na kaamakaamee.*

He attains peace into whom all desires enter as waters enter the ocean, which, filled from all sides, remains unmoved; but not the man full of desires.

Attachment has a direct connection with the state of mind which is known as sthitaprajna. One may be able to still the senses and the mind, but if one is not able to disassociate from the sensory world, confusion will prevail. The entire process of pratyahara, dharana or dhyana is actually a part of balancing and harmonizing, allowing one to switch off the switches which are not important at a given moment.

The intellect or buddhi, when connected with action and reaction, senses, worldly objects and the desire for pleasure, creates a state or a nature which is known as *vyabhicharini*, flirtatious, having a flirtatious buddhi. Like a honey bee which goes to twenty flowers to collect pollen, the human nature goes to twenty objects seeking pleasure. Just as the honey bee, after collecting pollen brings it back to its hive and stores it, similarly buddhi which has run around the world seeking pleasure, stores all that accumulated information internally. All that is stored is an experience of the search for pleasure, nothing more than that. It is classified into categories: successful and not successful, attainable and not attainable. Knowing about this is easy and simple, but disassociating is the most difficult part. Yoga says if one wants to go to the highest level of yoga, one has to disassociate.

Correct applications

The concept of sthitaprajna is liveable knowledge, experiential knowledge, and this knowledge is free from the gross experiences of pain and pleasure. It is based on the concept of truth and reality. However, the concept of truth and reality is applicable not only to good people, but also to bad people. The entire expression of human nature depends on how one uses one's faculties. An enlightened being who meditates and contemplates, is using his or her faculty to experience the higher reality. If the same enlightened being uses that faculty to discover new means of harassing others, even that faculty will become negative. It does not really matter whether one has attained the highest or not. What matters is how one applies it.

The term 'experienced knowledge' means something one can experience. It is not only a concept and an idea. The processes of pratyahara, dharana and dhyana are not only processes of self-observation, they are also training. They teach in which direction one should apply one's faculties and how to use those faculties to reach the highest aim of life, *poornata*, fulfilment.

The concept of sthitaprajna includes the right application of one's faculties, the right application of one's wisdom. If this application is not there, one can never be a sthitaprajna. So, this is a beautiful expression: one works through one's personality and mind, one transcends the limitations of the gross nature, one comes to a point of harmony and balance, and from that point one learns how to apply steady wisdom in life.



5

Pitfalls on the Path of Yoga

Pitfalls on the path of yoga are an aspect of life which need to be looked into before yoga can be perfected. Some of the pitfalls are fear, anger, passion, oversleeping, fantasy, sleeplessness, overeating, fasting, disease, attachment, the opposite of yamas and the opposite of niyamas. These are the main barriers in the perfection of yoga.

Recognizing the gunas

It has been stated that each individual is subject to the gunas. In each person, one of the gunas is more dominant. The general thought or the general feeling is that yoga sadhana can transform the gunas. It is true, it is possible to transform and overcome the gunas, but first one has to specifically identify the shortcomings that need to be overcome. One has to work specifically to transform and transcend the prevailing guna. Therefore, yoga places a lot of emphasis on recognizing the dominant guna and converting or transforming that into the next positive quality.

If one is tamasic by nature, an effort has to be made to change the tamasic nature into rajas and later on into sattwa. If one is rajasic by nature, an effort has to be made to establish oneself in sattwa. For this to happen one has to be aware of one's *swabhava*, nature, and one's dominant guna. There are many people who speculate that as the mind evolves, the guna will also evolve. There are people who

say that a criminal will overcome the criminal mentality by practising meditation, but unfortunately it does not happen that way. Unless meditation is guided to observe the mind and to alter the perceptions of the mind, the criminal is not going to change.

For example, a tamasic person practising unguided meditation will no doubt have some experiences within, but the tamasic nature will also evolve with meditation. This is not speculation, it happens that way. Through meditation a criminal can become a better criminal, a murderer can become a better murderer, just as through meditation a saint can become a better saint. Meditation should be correctly directed or guided to change the existing guna.

Yogis have realized this, therefore they have placed great emphasis on the control of the mind, observing the thoughts and balancing the involvement of the individual with the external world. Keeping this in view, the literature on yoga describes twelve items which are seen to be major impediments or blocks on the spiritual path.

Twelve obstacles on the path

1. *Fear*: Fear is confronted in meditation. If one attempts to change one's nature, attitude and perception, if one attempts to change the condition in which one lives and thinks, fear is bound to come up. For example, if a letter is received from the boss saying that one's services are terminated, just reading the letter can cause an anxiety attack. Fear has to be overcome. This fear is related to insecurity. Later on in spiritual life, this fear converts into the fear of dissolution of the individual self. The practitioner wonders, "What will my state be if I lose my individuality?" This fear stems from the basic vritti of self-preservation which has been handed down by our forefathers. The cavemen who used to live in jungles were more aware of living their day-to-day life and were always in fear, always thinking of self-preservation. This idea of self-preservation is so deeply rooted in the human personality that any change in the normal pattern of life can create insecurity.

2. *Anger*: Anger is a reaction towards a situation which one cannot control. One becomes angry and frustrated when control over a situation, condition or one's environment seems to have been lost. Therefore, anger is related to the sense of fear and insecurity.

3. *Passion*: The four basic instincts, *ahara*, craving, *nidra*, sleep, *bhaya*, fear and *maithuna*, sexual drive, are the building blocks of the human body and personality. Here, passion means the physical lust associated with the sexual drive of every person. The sexual drive in itself is an instinct inherited from God. However, sexuality can play havoc in the life of a spiritual aspirant who has gone beyond a certain point, because the sexual act will bring the consciousness down, it will not uplift the consciousness. In a normal day-to-day situation, the sexual act links the consciousness more deeply with the object of pleasure. Whether it be yoga or tantra, it is emphasized that instead of associating with objects of pleasure one should sublimate the drive and use it to expand one's consciousness. The effort to sublimate the sexual drive is a conscious effort, whereas the instinct which brings one down is a natural process. There is a conflict in the life of a spiritual aspirant and management of physical passion is necessary.

4. *Overindulgence in sleep*: Some people, if given the opportunity, would love to just stay in bed sleeping. Overindulgence in sleep reduces efficiency and dynamism of the mind. It creates a state of lethargy, *alasya*. It is incompatible with the alert state of the mind which is needed for the perfection of yogic practices.

Yoga gives a number of hours appropriate for sleep according to age, lifestyle and the sadhana or anusthana which one is going to perform. There are many advanced practices in yoga, especially related to mantra anusthana and mantra japa, which require the practitioner to practise the mantra between midnight and 4 am. Some sadhanas require that one sleeps for two hours regardless of one's physical state or condition. Some sadhanas require that one sleeps for only one hour a day.

There is no sadhana which says one can sleep for more than eight hours. Eight hours is for people who are under twenty; after that the time span reduces and it becomes six. People below the age of sixty can make do with six hours of sleep which is the physical and mental requirement. Beyond sixty, one reduces the number of hours to five or three. Lethargy is a state where one lacks everything, whether it is motivation, the drive to do something, willpower or even conviction. All this is part of *alasya*. Sleep and too much sleep can be regarded as lethargy. However, one may sleep less but lounge all day long and that is also lethargy: from inactivity and disassociation with what is happening. Sleep has to be carefully monitored.

5. *Fantasy*: A person who is lost in personal achievement imagines himself to be great and desires instant results, or has expectations of some psychic achievement, lives in a world of fantasy.

A mental concept superimposes itself on a real situation. When that type of superimposition takes place, the person who superimposes it lives in another dimension of experience. In psychiatry this is called schizophrenia, and it can become a disease. It is also a symptom which appears in meditation because the experiences which are emanating from one's own mind are so vivid and real that one is unable to differentiate between what is real and what is unreal.

There are many stories in the Indian tradition reflecting this state of mind. One day, one of the swamis, before he came to the ashram, he was in his house resting on his bed and imagining his future. He got so lost in daydreams that he began to live his future. He was thinking, 'Right now I am studying, then I will go to Ganga Darshan and do the two-year course. Then I will come back home, I'll marry, after some time there will be little kids. They will be running to me saying, "Dada, Dada." I will be telling them, "Keep quiet." I'll be calling my wife, saying, "Keep the children quiet – I am busy," and if she doesn't listen to me I will give her the stick.'

So he picked up a stick and hit something with it. In Indian homes generally, in order to avoid rats and insects from attacking food, people put food items in an earthen pot and hang it from the ceiling. He hit an earthen pot hanging over him, and all the flour it contained fell on him. Then he realized that he had lost contact with reality. If one tends to lose contact with reality, it is considered to be an obstacle.

6. *Sleeplessness*: Sleeping too little can agitate the nerves and make the mind cloudy and foggy. One loses the ability to make correct judgements or decisions, and that state is to be avoided.

7. *Overeating*: It is a well known fact that if one overeats, the body systems become sluggish. It becomes difficult to perform sadhana.

8. *Fasting*: One should fast according to the requirements of the body. Yoga is not against fasting, it is against extended fasting which may not be necessary. If one is healthy, strong and the body systems are functioning well, there is no need to fast. Fasting is to be used as therapy or as a process of purification. That is its purpose. If fasting is used wrongly as part of sadhana, the suffering of the body will bring the mind back down into the body.

This was the experience of Buddha. He fasted and fasted until he was just bones and he fell down in a swoon because of hunger. Somebody gave him kheer, which he ate because he realized there was no need to fast and he made a breakthrough in consciousness. There is no need to go to extremes; one should follow the middle path. Too much fasting is bad and too much eating is also bad for the body. One should have what is required, not more and not less, and keep one's aim clear. This was the sentiment of Buddha.

9. *Disease*: Disease is a natural condition which cannot be avoided, just as old age cannot be avoided. Like old age, disease comes naturally and spontaneously to the body. However, there are different kinds of diseases. Some are manmade and one invites these diseases if one is not careful.

If one leaves the doors open while sleeping, one is inviting the thieves to come in. One has to be careful, pragmatic and practical. If one creates conditions in the body where it can remain basically healthy, one only allows natural illnesses to come which can be managed and there is no problem. However, if there is overindulgence in life, and ignorance or carelessness becomes the cause of disease, it is a shortcoming of the mind and personality. With such shortcomings, yoga cannot be perfected.

10. *Attachment*: In yogic literature it has been said many times that one should reduce the area of mental involvement. If that can be done, one's attachments will become less. If the area of personal involvement is increased, attachment will increase or expand. Attachment is personal association and some of these personal associations are irrelevant, not called for, or unnecessary.

11. *The opposites of yamas*: If one is untrue, derives happiness from falsehood, is violent in nature, craves to possess, desires to acquire what belongs to others, is absolutely materialistic and yet attempts to follow the path of yoga, one will find it hard.

12. *The opposites of niyamas*: If one is impure and confused, negative and pessimistic in life, not content with what one has, likes to lead an easy life and does not want to strive and struggle, has no inclination to discover one's potentials and is happy the way one is, has no consideration for the Universal Being, but thinks of oneself as the most important being around which the whole world revolves, again it will be difficult to progress on the yogic path.

These twelve pitfalls of spiritual life need to be managed. In order to assist the process of management, Sage Patanjali said at the outset that perfection of yama and niyama are prerequisites of yoga. This helps one to become aware that these are the first steps which need to be recognized and considered. This ensures that yoga does not remain a mechanical process, but becomes an experiential process.





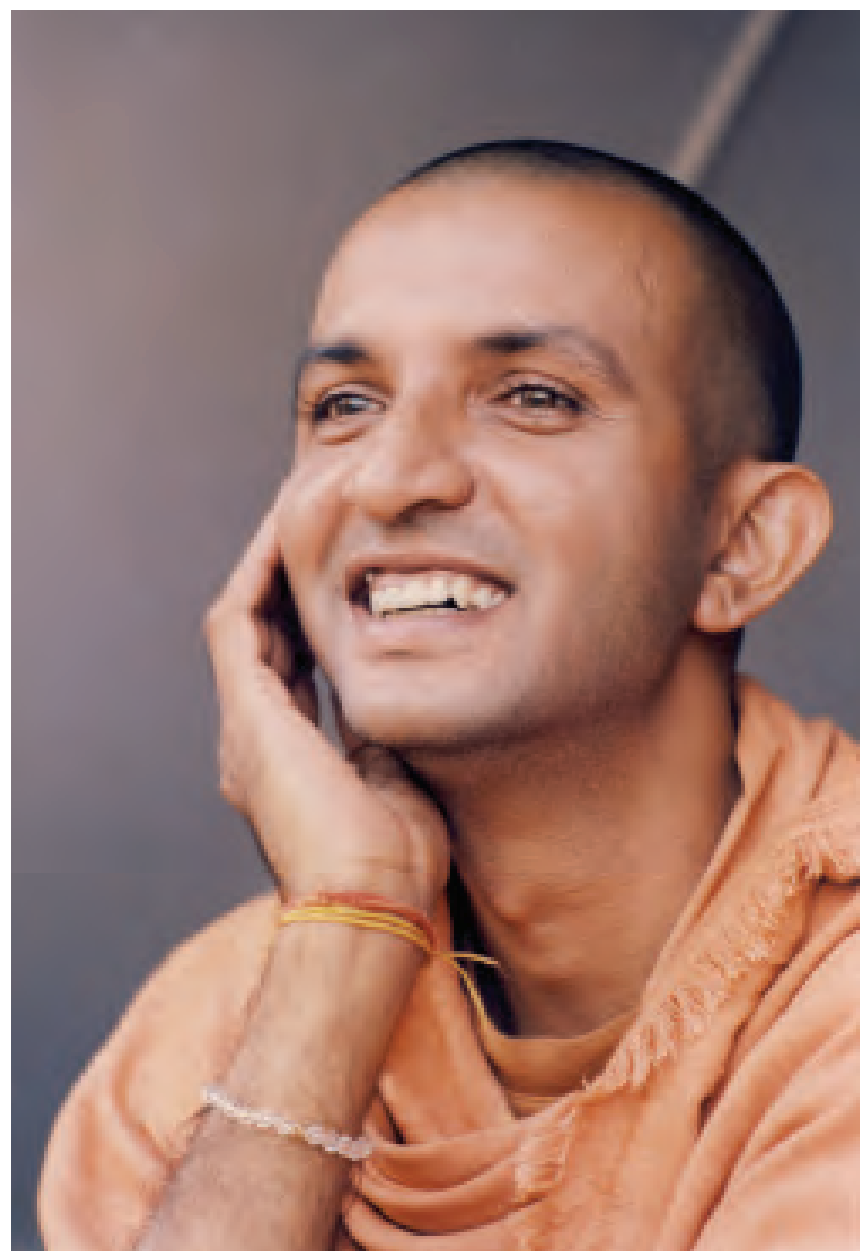












Apart from perfection of yamas and niyamas, yogic literatures have talked about being keenly aware of the instincts: ahara, nidra, bhaya and maithuna, and how and in what intensity they manifest in life. An effort has to be made to sublimate these instincts so that one is not a slave of them but can harness their potential. It also speaks a lot about managing attachments by recognizing what is a need and what is an ambition in life, by recognizing what is the strength and what is the weakness in one's life. Enough guidelines have been provided in yoga to avoid the pitfalls of spiritual life. These are not theoretical or philosophical ideas, but natural expressions of the human personality which have to be managed. They can be managed, and using the tools of yoga, a spiritual aspirant should be able to manage it.



6

Kundalini Sadhanas and Psychic Centres

The role of the chakras and kundalini in the evolutionary process and their association with different states of mind and experiences has to be understood clearly before one attempts to understand the methods of developing positive and optimistic values and qualities.

Kundalini

In the discussion about consciousness, it was mentioned that manifestation or creation is the outcome of two forces coming together. One can call these two forces positive and negative, male and female, Shiva and Shakti, Purusha and Prakriti, Brahma and Maya, or whatever names one wants to give according to one's intellect. One manifestation represents the all-pervasive universal consciousness, and the other the metamorphosis of that transcendental, infinite existence into a finite existence or dimension, recognized simply as energy. On one side is consciousness and on the other side is energy.

Consciousness can be considered to be like the day, and energy can be considered to be like the night. They are two opposite poles, but they overlap at one point. The point where they overlap is the beginning of creation or manifestation. This overlapping of consciousness and energy is also the beginning of the process of kundalini or the kundalini experience.

The word *kundalini* has been understood in two forms. *Kunda* means depth, a well and a form of support. The energy which resides in the kunda is known as kundalini. The image of a well shows that it is below ground level and in its depths is water. The deepest part is considered to be the location of kundalini. The energy, the power, which resides at the base, is one definition of kundalini. This definition refers specifically to the chakras in the spinal cord and mooladhara at the perineum, below the coccygeal plexus. In that depth kundalini resides.

The second definition of kundalini is from the word *kundali* which means coils, like the serpent's coils. From the perspective of kundali, the understanding of consciousness manifesting in life needs to be recognized.

There are the three states of consciousness: *jagrat*, *swapna*, *sushupti*, and *turiya* is the fourth state beyond them. The serpent coiled three-and-a-half symbolizes kundalini. Its tail begins in the *jagrat* state and its mouth covers the *turiya* dimension. Referring to the association of kundalini with consciousness, this definition of kundalini as coiled is more accurate.

Levels of consciousness

Consciousness is all-pervasive and energy is all-pervasive, and these two faculties interact with each other. As a result of their interaction with creation or manifestation (the dimension which gives knowledge and experience of different dimensions, *lokas* or states), levels of consciousness arise.

Traditionally it is said that there are twenty-one states of consciousness, in three groups of seven. The first seven relate to the life forms which have lower levels of consciousness than humans. This starts right from the one-celled amoeba. The centres of experiences at the lower level are known as *patalas* and they are seven in number. The seven *patalas* are: *atala*, *vitala*, *sutala*, *rasatala*, *talatala*, *mahatala* and *patala*. In the human dimension the area of perception is identified by *chakras*. The seven chakras are mooladhara, swadhisthana, manipura, anahata, vishuddhi, ajna and sahasrara. Beyond

the normal human range, the experience of consciousness and energy is associated with *lokas*, which are also seven in number. The seven lokas are enumerated in the Gayatri mantra, the bhuah loka, bhuvah loka, swah loka, mahah loka, janah loka, tapah loka, satya loka. These twenty-one states of consciousness represent the entire range of creation. They are all governed or represented by kundalini, for kundalini is the combination of consciousness and energy coming together to create something new.

Symbology of the snake

Kundalini is represented in the form of a serpent. A snake lives underground where it is not visible to anyone. One does not know about it, one can only guess. It comes out of a hole, but nobody knows where it lives inside that hole. Similarly, the ascent of consciousness and energy takes place, but where it starts in the gross body, nobody knows.

Mythologically the serpent has always represented power, strength and wisdom. If one suddenly sees a snake, one is fearful. Why? One may say it is poisonous and its bite causes death, or the fear may be justified by other ideas, but its root cause is power. The snake represents power which one does not have and therefore one is afraid of it.

The snake represents wisdom in all traditions, Indian and western. The best example is in the Old Testament where the snake pointed out the tree of life to Adam and Eve and introduced them to the sweetness of the apple. According to the Old Testament, the fruit from the tree of life was the fruit which gave knowledge of good and bad, right and wrong. The snake indicated the way to wisdom. Symbolically the snake represents wisdom, and if one relates the symbology of the serpent to human evolution the correlation is accurate. It is only after the rising of kundalini that new areas of perception open up.

Manifestation and return

In animals, kundalini resides in patala, the lowest centre of the animal kingdom. In sentient beings who have the

full faculty of mind, action, intellect and speech, kundalini resides in mooladhara. In enlightened beings kundalini resides in bhuh loka. The kundalini of Ramana Maharshi or the kundalini of Swami Sivananda was not in mooladhara. They were a different calibre of people. For them the lowest point of existence was bhuh loka, the first of the lokas. Such people have attained transcendental or divine consciousness.

Chakras represent manifestations of consciousness and energy where a specific transformation has taken place and a specific experience of existence has been attained. From the perspective of human beings the topmost of the seven chakras is sahasrara and the lowest one is mooladhara. Sahasrara is the seat of awakened consciousness, not transcendental or cosmic consciousness. The next chakra is ajna which is the seat of individual consciousness, the doorway between the individual and the cosmic. Below ajna is vishuddhi chakra which is the seat of the most subtle element in creation, space. Space is the source for any kind of growth and development. Below vishuddhi is anahata chakra which is the seat of the air element. Below anahata is manipura chakra, the seat of the fire element, below that is swadhisthana, the seat of the water element, and the bottom chakra is mooladhara, the seat of the densest element, earth. This has been identified as the evolution of consciousness and energy into the created dimension. Sometimes the word 'involution' has been used to describe the energy moving down from sahasrara to mooladhara, but this is a misleading term.

Evolution is when something comes from nothing. From nothing, from the unmanifest, life, nature, animals, trees have come about through an intensive process. It is a unique achievement which no human being and no science can replicate. Science cannot make even a particle of dust though it can do many other things which don't involve the actual creation of an element.

Mechanically one can go anywhere, but that is just scientific knowhow, understanding and technology. When it comes to the creation of an element it is difficult for science.

With all their knowledge, scientists cannot create a speck of dust. The movement from the unmanifest to the manifest is definitely beyond the greatest achievement in the world of science. God is the greatest scientist. His experiment was successful because this evolution makes something appear where initially there was nothing.

The other perspective is evolution of consciousness back to the source, transforming the gross state of consciousness in life forms, in human beings, and making it more and more subtle until one is able to experience the cosmic reality. Evolution works both ways, downwards and upwards.

Chakras as transformers

Chakras can also be recognized as step-down transformers. A power generation industry makes a lot of electricity, but those megawatts of electricity cannot come into people's homes. A home cannot use megawatts of electricity, because its requirements are 220 or 110 watts. There is a process of stepping down and reducing the potency of electrical energy and that process happens through transformers. Thousands of megawatts of electricity go to one transformer and there they are converted into kilowatts, maybe 11,000 kilowatts. When that electricity reaches another transformer it is further reduced and becomes 440 watts. The 440 watts goes to another transformer, is reduced and becomes 220 watts. The 220 watts comes to yet another transformer and becomes 110. Each transformer steps down the intensity or potency of electrical energy so that it can be used.

The chakras are similar to transformers. If the entire cosmic consciousness manifested in mooladhara, there would be no life. If one megawatt of electricity flowed into a tube light, a big blow up and total destruction would result. One's present consciousness and physiological structure are not able to handle the entire manifestation of cosmic consciousness. The present creation is not able to handle it.

At each level of stepping down, the roles of consciousness and energy become different. Mooladhara is matter, the

lowest, final and densest form of creation. The progression of consciousness and energy, referred to as kundalini, has come to a standstill. Mooladhara is the source of instincts, sexuality and procreation. Mooladhara represents the faculty of procreation, the primal urge to become many, *maithuna*. Swadhisthana represents the second instinct, *bhaya*, fear, and the mind. The symbology of swadhisthana is something worth considering: one finds the ocean and the moon. Water represents life and the moon represents the mind; the mind controlling life. Manas, buddhi, chitta and ahamkara in their secure compartments, are managing the affairs of life through pain and pleasure, suffering and joy. When the boundaries of their natural compartments are removed the first experience is of fear. The instinct governed by manipura is *ahara*, the urge for satisfaction and fulfilment of desire. The instinct of sleep, *nidra*, is governed by anahata. These first four chakras are related to instincts.

Consciousness and energy

Related to the normal human consciousness, mooladhara represents the conscious mind, swadhisthana is associated with the subconscious mind, manipura with the unconscious mind, and anahata represents turiya, the awakened mind. Vishuddhi represents the transformation of mind from the individual towards the cosmic. Ajna represents knowledge of the self. Sahasrara represents enlightenment which is the total awakening of the human personality.

In relation to energy and its activity, mooladhara represents the activity of the senses and the movement of the body. Swadhisthana represents the existence of the *tanmatras*, the essence of the senses. Manipura represents *prana shakti*, the vital or life energy. Anahata represents the subtle vital energy, *chitta shakti*. Vishuddhi represents the causal vital energy, the *karana sharira*, the causal body. Ajna represents individuality, one's personal identity.

At the same time, there is an association with a god and a goddess in each chakra. A god represents the consciousness

component of the chakra, and the goddess its energy component.

The experiences of most sentient beings revolve around the four chakras, mooladhara to anahata. This happens in day-to-day life and few people leave these four chakras and work with the higher ones.

Vishuddhi is the centre of transformation. For real yoga sadhakas and aspirants, yoga is not just a pastime or hobby but a part of a lifelong sadhana. They expect transformation and change to occur. They work at the level of vishuddhi which involves trying to change the negative reactions into positive affirmations of consciousness.

The word *chakra* means vortex. When the wind is moving in a circular pattern it creates what is known as a whirlwind. In bodies of water also there are circular patterns. A whirlpool is a vortex. It is the quality of a vortex that if one gets sucked into it, it is difficult to come out. One is held under the power, influence and sway of the vortex. If one looks at the chakra which is predominantly functioning in one's life, it will be noticed that one is held in its vortex and that to come out from that influence is difficult. Yogis believe that through conscious effort, by becoming aware of the role that a chakra plays in one's evolution and growth in life, the influence of that chakra can be overcome and one can move on to the next. This is the theory of kundalini yoga.

Through conscious effort one can come out of the grip of one chakra and begin to work with the next. One enters that vortex with its negative and restrictive aspects, the aspects that hold one down. The moment one is able to break those barriers one moves on to the next chakra. One has to break out of the gravity of each chakra until the highest centre of evolution in life, sahasrara, is reached. In sahasrara the barriers, distinctions or differentiations between each dimension are broken and everything flows into one. That is known as the union of Shiva and Shakti in sahasrara.

7

Cultivation of Positive Values and Qualities

If people want opportunities and chances in life, they can use different methods to cultivate positive qualities and values. For example, people who find it easy to become aware of their shortcomings in behaviour or thought may work on their opposites to develop positive attitudes and thoughts. Whenever one becomes aware of something negative, an attempt can be made to conquer that tendency in such a manner that it becomes an opportunity to develop positive attitudes. When there is anger, one tries to establish the opposite of anger. This requires a moment to moment observation of what is happening in the form of responses and reactions to different mental states, and to external situations or conditions which trigger the mental states. This is a good method, but it requires preliminary work on developing awareness, and it means a good line of communication with a teacher or guru is required.

Positive qualities

The first step is to develop awareness of what one is doing. One needs to chalk out one's weaknesses before they can be worked on. One needs to find out what triggers negativity within and what upsets one's balance. One's basic needs must be discovered, what is lacking in a situation and what is needed to make life more harmonious. It may sometimes be necessary to change the environment so that there is an

inner and outer shift. Finally, without being egoistical, one needs to discover what one has to offer.

Everyone is trying to build up positive qualities in some way or the other, consciously or unconsciously. People are trying to figure out where they stand in this world. What are the values they are supposed to follow, as written in various scriptures? How can they follow them without becoming too orthodox and restricted? All the definitions of consciousness show that self-pity and similar traits which are developed due to weakness are not supposed to be part of one's consciousness. Therefore, one should try to understand how matter or the gross body is working and how consciousness works. Positive qualities and values can be built up by trying to understand what consciousness is. This method involves figuring out what is generated from inside and whether it is applicable for one's development and growth or not.

Yoga states which positive qualities must be activated. Rather than chasing a fantasy, from the beginning one should identify different qualities in relation to one's nature, behaviour and attitude. There are certain aspects of one's nature which cannot be changed overnight. If people try to change themselves without first recognizing their personality, they go through a personality crisis. By superimposing a discipline or an idea on one's performance, behaviour or mentality, which may not necessarily be compatible but sounds attractive, one cannot acquire a positive quality or value. Yoga applies the formula: first self-recognition and then self-transformation.

Meditative approach

The first approach is meditation. It includes relaxation, awareness, and willpower or the will to change.

Relaxation: The nature, mind or personality of everyone is in a state of tension, alertness and activity. If one looks at a drawing of a wave pattern, one can see the ascent and descent of that particular wave. If one considers this wave to represent the state of mind, whatever one's responses,

projections and reactions are to a situation, they will always happen when the mind is at its peak. When the mind is at its lowest ebb and one is exposed to the same situation, one says, "Why bother? What have I got to do with it?" Although one is exposed to the same situation, at one point there is involvement and at another point there is no involvement.

Everyone has the ability to find a solution, but why does one only take an interest sometimes? This happens because of the mental peaks. Relaxation implies that the normal levels of tensions and activities of the mind can be managed in such a way that one is not subject to mental highs and lows so there is no block in one's approach. In the state of relaxation there is no restriction or limitation in one's assessment of the situation and the self-created barriers are lowered. When tensions are lowered, free play is given to one's ability to analyze and reflect upon what has happened, and to come to a correct judgement or decision.

Awareness: Awareness implies that one knows what has to change. Awareness implies one has an idea of what is the right method for one's involvement or participation, and that one is able to use past experiences to manage or transform a particular condition or situation. Awareness is the link with buddhi and as one develops greater awareness, the buddhi dimension is accessed more and more.

Willpower: Willpower is maintaining conviction, adhering to the right situation and proper context and having faith and belief in it. If one distrusts a process, it is not going to have any effect. If one can trust or believe in the process, the mind becomes compatible with the process and it can be changed.

There is a statement in the *Yoga Sutras* (1:14) which has been repeated in relation to one's practice:

Sa tu deerghakaala nairantaryasatkaarasevito dridhabhoomih.

Sadhana becomes firmly grounded by being continued for a long time, with reverence, without interruption.

This statement is simple. In order to reach a point of perfection, one needs to follow the process for a long period, *dirghakala*. One needs to be regular. Regularity implies continuous awareness. If continuous awareness is not there, regularity is not there. *Satkara*, faith, refers to willpower. Willpower is not an intellectual conviction, believing in something rigidly to achieve something. Willpower is the entire personality being in tune with one's aspirations, with what one is doing and believes in. When there is harmony between personality and aspiration, all kinds of blockages are easily removed and one achieves the target without any problem. Willpower is tuning the mind to an idea, an action, a belief which motivates one to achieve the aim one has set for oneself.

These three components become part of meditation and help one to adopt different values and qualities. The more the awareness and ability to relax and adjust to different situations increases, the more one is able to fine-tune one's personality, and the less conflict is encountered.

Reflective approach: SWAN theory

The second approach is reflective. One has to recognize the inherent strengths (S) in one's personality, one's weaknesses (W), one's aspirations or ambitions (A) and one's needs (N) in life. This is what is known as the SWAN theory.

The first step is to identify the natural strengths and weaknesses or limitations: a written list of the predominant items is made with an objective attitude. One identifies a way of compensating for a weakness by cultivating one of the positive qualities, giving more life to optimism, creativity and strength. One has to decide what one's ambitions and aspirations are and to assess whether they are attainable or not. What are the ambitions one is chasing but which may not actually be the requirement in the physical, social, personal or spiritual context? Finally, one must decide what one's needs are.

For this a proper chart has to be made, including the four charts of one's SWAN. One looks at the strengths, weaknesses, ambitions and needs from the personal angle and also in regard to family, community, society and spirituality. It is important to remember that while cultivating a value, the negative side of the value should not be rejected. Rather, the force of the negative side has to be used to convert it into a positive experience.

Surrender

The third approach is known as *Ishwara pranidhana*, surrendering to a higher will. This takes the form of a special attitude which *bhaktas*, followers of bhakti yoga, have propounded. It is developing an attitude in which one becomes an instrument which is being played by the higher power. This is expressed in the prayer of St Francis of Assisi.

*Lord, make me an instrument of Thy peace!
Where there is hatred, let me sow love,
Where there is injury, pardon,
Where there is doubt, faith,
Where there is despair, love,
Where there is darkness, light,
Where there is sadness, joy.*

*O Divine Master, grant that I
May not so much seek to be consoled as to console,
To be understood as to understand,
To be loved as to love,
For it is in giving that we receive,
It is in pardoning that we are pardoned,
It is in dying that we are born to eternal life.*

The bhaktas have that attitude. Swami Satyananda said many times that one should have the attitude of a servant, *dasya bhava*. A servant simply obeys and does not bring his or her idiosyncrasies before the master.

One may think that this is just a concept of bhakti yoga, but in relation to human personality it is an attainable aspect of one's nature. The more one allows oneself to flow with the course of life and its events with the idea, 'I have surrendered to the Divine Will', the more change one will feel inside as time goes by. A sense of purity will abound, a sense of peace will be experienced.

Four paths

Ishwara pranidhana is for people with more active emotions. Reflection on strength, weakness, ambition and need is for people who are more intellectual. The meditative method is meant for those who are introverted, intuitive and psychic in nature. Psychology has broadly identified people into four groups: dynamic, emotional, intellectual and the abnormal group. Psychology says people are abnormal whether they are supernormal or subnormal, so abnormal includes the psychic group.

Prior to psychology, yogis came to the same conclusion that there are four categories of people. They were called *jnanis* referring to the intellectual type, *bhaktas* referring to the emotional type, *tyagis* referring to the mystical type, and *kriyasheela* referring to the dynamic type. As each type needs to cultivate a different dimension of life, yogis described different methods.

To overcome negativity, a prayer from the heart may be enough, but there are different types of people. If a person is a bhakta by nature, he can do it. If a person is not, he can pray a hundred times and nothing will happen. There is not one single way which is applicable to everyone. If only one way existed, people would not be teaching kundalini yoga, raja yoga, jnana yoga, bhakti yoga, and so on, but just one practice. The tradition has developed for many thousands of years, for people have different natures and personalities. If prayer is the ultimate solution to everything, let us all pray and forget everything else. However, it is not the ultimate solution.

1. *Bhakta*: Prayer corresponds to the emotional personality.

2. *Kriyashela*: For the dynamic group there is no fixed process, because in each dynamic person there will be a subtle trait also which is based mainly on *shraddha*, faith, and *vishvas*, trust or belief.

3. *Jnani*: Jnana yoga is for *jnanis*, intellectuals. Reflection does not begin with the question, “Who am I?” There is never an answer to that question. Such questions, which are ambiguous in nature, will never indicate the real you. What will be the answer to the question, “Who am I?” You can say you are the soul, the spirit, but this will be incorrect because you have no experience of the spirit, so how can you say you are a soul? It is like a tree asking itself, “Who am I?” and saying, “I am the seed,” but the seed disappeared when the tree grew, so how can the tree say, “I am the seed.” It would be like a child who doesn’t know the ABC, but says, “I am a scientist.” The books written on jnana yoga say that it is about self-questioning. However, the answers have to be basic. Begin from here: Who am I? I do not know who I am, but I know that I have these weaknesses, these strengths, these aspirations and these needs. This is my first realization in self-knowledge.

If you desire to know something beyond your ability, you are just going to be splattered on the ground without any idea of where you are. Like a raindrop falling and saying, “Oh, I am water, I am going to mix with water and become the ocean.” Suddenly it lands splat in the middle of the desert, and disappears, or becomes part of a mirage. An ignorant mind evolves many different mirages and is attracted to them, whereas the healthy reflective mind is not drawn to any mirage; rather, it accepts the reality as it is. Reflection has to begin by recognizing the reality that surrounds you and in which you live. Work has to start from that level.

4. *Tyagi*: Similarly, if people who are meditative and mystical by nature try to awaken different types of higher experiences in meditation, they will have a glimpse no

doubt, but the vision which may be called a mystical experience by other people will have no substance. They can look at themselves in a mirror, but the reflection is not going to replace them. They are alive, the reflection is not alive. The reflection is only the image of themselves as they are at present. Even people who seek higher spiritual visions are imposing their own idea on the mental mirror. They see their own idea reflected in the mental mirror, and that becomes the vision for them, but such visions are never real.

For example, there are so many stories of after-death experiences which are never uniform. A person born in India experiences images of the Indian culture: the god of death, Yamaraj and other deities, gods and demons as described in Indian mythology. People from other countries see other images. They come across this huge figure with a white beard holding a sceptre in his hand and saying, "You go to hell. You go to heaven."

What does it mean? After all, if one goes to the ocean, everyone sees the ocean, just a vast expanse of water, but here everybody is having different after-death experiences. It means that whatever they had unconsciously imbibed from their culture, religion, belief and lifestyle is being reflected. These mystical experiences are reflections of the human mind. Similarly, if in meditation a person sees God, it is not going to change him for the better. Rather, it will be detrimental, as it is going to boost his ego and make him more arrogant. Until and unless one is pure, mystical experiences will always have a negative reaction, for one thinks that one is superior to other people because of having seen something others have not and one becomes more arrogant.

In meditation the emphasis should be on developing an understanding of one's nature, *swabhava*. Therefore, meditation has two categories: *sakara* and *nirakara*. In the *sakara* forms of meditation, one gains knowledge of one's nature, of the impressions that alter and affect one's being and of the images that create an impression in one's

being and give birth to a corresponding feeling. That is why we start with sakara meditation, developing relaxation, awareness and the willingness to change.

Eventually, one has to shift to *nirakara* where all impressions are dissolved. At that time sattwa guna will manifest. One may think of the best moral concepts, such as one should be compassionate, not speak untruth or harm others. Presently, however, they are only in the form of intellectual concepts for everyone. They are not yet natural expressions or part of one's reality. They are part of one's aspiration but not part of one's reality. Although much has been said in yogic literature about yamas, niyamas and other qualities that need to be cultivated, the method of attaining them for most people today falls into three categories. The first one is meditation, the second is reflection and the third is Ishwara pranidhana.



8

The Role of Guru

Guru is one of the names of God, just like Rama, Krishna or Devi. It is a name which represents an attribute of God: the energy which dispels darkness. It has also been said that guru is inside; the power to change, the power to transform and the power to enlighten a being is within everyone. This energy, this shakti, this power, is an attribute of the turiya state of consciousness and in order to access this source of power, a person needs a catalyst, an external agent. The external agent is the physical form of a person who is recognized by the aspirant as the guru.

Definition of the physical guru

The concept of the physical guru is someone who knows the process of self-transformation. A guru who can understand the limitations and the abilities of each aspirant can guide aspirants according to their evolution. The concept of guru implies a natural understanding between two people. A guru does not say, "I am a guru." Those who do are caught in their own ego-trip. A guru does not say, "I am a master," for such statements or sentiments go against the principle of spiritual life. In spiritual life one is supposed to transcend the ego. Saying, "I am a guru" is not transcending the ego; rather, it is overemphasizing one's self-image and self-esteem. This self-projection leads to the downfall of a spiritual person, whether it be the master or the disciple.

According to all spiritual traditions, the realization of guruhood or connection with the inner guru, takes place when the entire system of the body and mind is purified. There is no question of anybody claiming to be a guru. In the state of purification, if ego is to be transformed and transcended, naturally the aspirant develops simplicity, innocence and purity. These become the hallmarks or trademarks of an enlightened being.

Guru-disciple relationship

The association that a spiritual master and a spiritual aspirant have with each other develops trust and faith. This trust and faith creates an awareness in the mind of the spiritual aspirant, "This person is my guide." This trust and faith has to be innocent.

There is a story of a saint who walks through a town with his disciples. He goes to a bar and has a drink of whisky. The disciples become happy and say, "Well, if the guru is doing it, there is nothing wrong with it and we can also do it." They order a huge glass of whisky each and get drunk. The guru then goes to a nightclub, listens to music and dances. The disciples think, "When the guru does it, it must be all right and also good for us, for the guru is only teaching us through his example." They start dancing, listening to music and displaying all kinds of funny behaviour. The guru goes into the red light district. The disciples say, "If it is all right for the guru, it must be all right for us," and they have a good time. Finally, the guru goes to a place where glass is being melted. He takes a beaker full of molten glass and drinks it. This time the disciples say, "Only gurus can do that. We can't."

This is a story, but in the lives of many people it is a real story. If you look at yourself, how many times do you compare yourself with your guide, teacher and master? If you want to do something and the guru does it, you think, "Oh, it is sanctioned." If the guru does something that you can't do, you say, "Oh well, only gurus can do it because

they are powerful siddhas.” With such a comparative and competitive mentality, the relationship with the guru cannot be established. Rather, it is a false relationship and you are duping yourself. Therefore, you must be clear in realizing that the relationship which has to be developed with the guru is based on understanding, trust, belief and the realization that this person can guide you.

A blade of grass cannot conceive of becoming a mango tree. Disciples are like the blade of grass and guru is like the mango tree. The basis of the relationship between the spiritual aspirant and the spiritual master is of understanding, faith and trust. It is knowing the limitations that exist in each one of us and accepting that. Therefore, it is also necessary not to have preconceived ideas about what a guru should or should not be because such ideas are generally false.

Surrender

The outcome of this relationship based on trust, faith and understanding is identification and surrender. This can be seen in the life of Swami Satyananda. He lived with Swami Sivananda for many years and then left the Rishikesh ashram under his guidance. However, even today, when it comes to his feelings for Swami Sivananda, he says, “I may be guru for others, but in my personal life I am still a disciple of my guru.” This sentiment was expressed most clearly when he sent his message for the World Yoga Convention, held in Munger in 1993: “The most memorable event in my life has been the moment when I surrendered myself to my guru.” That was the starting point of his spiritual life.

If we have to think of what has been the most memorable event in our life we will point out some achievement when we received a degree or a promotion. I do not think that anyone is going to say, “When I met my guru.” Nobody has said it so far. Nobody has the courage to say it because their concept of guru is a reflection of their personality and not the realization of the spirit which is being reflected by the

guru. This is a major difference between a spiritual master and an aspirant. If we can understand this much, we have understood everything.

The process by which the guru takes his disciples to task and inspires them to reach the highest is: sadhana, karma yoga and egodectomy – to some close disciples, not to everyone.

Sadhana

The most common process is sadhana, for everyone expects a nice outcome or achievement from sadhana. Therefore, the guru encourages one to participate and involve oneself in sadhana. However, even in sadhana, one makes mistakes.

The guru gives an instruction that this is what one needs to do, like so many rounds of japa. Instead of following that sadhana, people apply their mind and try to do more. When they do self-motivated sadhana they may lose their balance, because they applied the mind and crossed the threshold of safety. After all, they are not aware of their nature, mind, or vrittis.

The guru is also not one hundred percent aware, but the difference is that the guru is monitoring and observing. During this process of probing or monitoring, the instructions are, “You do this much,” because that is the safest threshold or system to follow. If people apply their mind and say, “Well, if I do more, I will attain faster,” then psychic imbalances happen and they lose mental and emotional balance. They will not accept their own shortcomings, but the blame for failure or unsuccessful effort will always be put on the guide.

For this reason, gurus are reluctant to guide people into higher yogas. They simply teach the basics and talk about the concept of yoga but they do not wish to guide them, because they know that people cannot disassociate themselves from their ambitions and the mind’s involvement in sadhana. This does not mean that they are incapable of achievement. It simply means that they need to work on

themselves to develop a correct level of identification with the energy that is being reflected by the guru. They need to follow the path in a gradual, systematic, progressive way.

Karma yoga

The second aspect which is emphasized is karma yoga, not in the sense of work, but in the form of developing the right attitude towards one's participation and involvement in society. The general mentality is such that when people think of spiritual life they begin to believe that spiritual life negates and denies participation in material efforts.

The concept of karma yoga is taught to the next, more sincere group of people, who are ready to go beyond sadhana. The direction is realizing that one is not free from actions; rather, one can change the participation in action to improve one's mentality, attitude and consciousness, and gain more wisdom. One can become free from attachment to experiences which bind the mind to the gross plane. Therefore, karma yoga as a belief and philosophy has been given a lot of importance.

Egodectomy

Once the disciple is able to disassociate himself from the bondage or the influence of karmas, the next step is egodectomy, destruction of ahamkara. This destruction or transformation of ego relates to the manifest, the subtle and the individual identity. Ego is seen in three forms here.

When the ego is associated with the manifest personality, the body and mind, it is seeking fulfilment. The manifestation of ego comes in the form of arrogance, the 'I am holier than you' attitude. In a gross or manifest personality it is only arrogance, *abhimana*.

When ego is related or associated with the subtle mind, it takes the form of what is known as self-esteem, confidence, optimism, belief in one's self, *swabhimana*. To begin with, at the mental level the guru tries to develop swabhimana in the disciple, the ability to trust oneself, to listen to one's

conscience, to know the appropriate and right method to achieve the goal. However, in the final stage, the guru helps the disciple to overcome the remnants of the individual self.

The remnants of the individual self is one's individuality. Loss of one's individuality creates a lot of fear in people because they begin to feel, "What will be my identity if I do not have my ego?" However, in spiritual life loss of identity is seen as a gain and not a loss. One gains in the sense that one overcomes the limited nature of the self and connects with the cosmic self.

This idea or concept is further clarified in the *Yoga Sutras*. After going through the various stages of savikalpa samadhi (savitarkara, nirvitarkara, savichara, nirvichara samadhi) comes *ananda samadhi*, the state of bliss. The last form of savikalpa samadhi is *asmita samadhi*, in which there is loss of individual identity. Only after this, the final state of nirvikalpa or nirbija samadhi begins. Egodectomy is the effort of the guru to take the disciple beyond the state of asmita to the realm of enlightenment.

The egodectomy can take any form, depending on the individual. What has to be recognized is the role of the aspirant in relation to the guru. The aspirant must strive to develop a sense of identification with the energy and spirit of the guru. This becomes a separate sadhana for the disciple, to evolve to the level of close connection where, although guru and disciple may live in two bodies, their spirit is one.

Trusting the guide

Guru is a spiritual aspirant who has gone through the process of personal transformation, who knows the pitfalls on the spiritual journey and can guide the aspirant to overcome those pitfalls. That is the meaning of the relationship between guru and disciple, and in spiritual life, guru is a necessity, not a compulsion, but definitely a necessity.

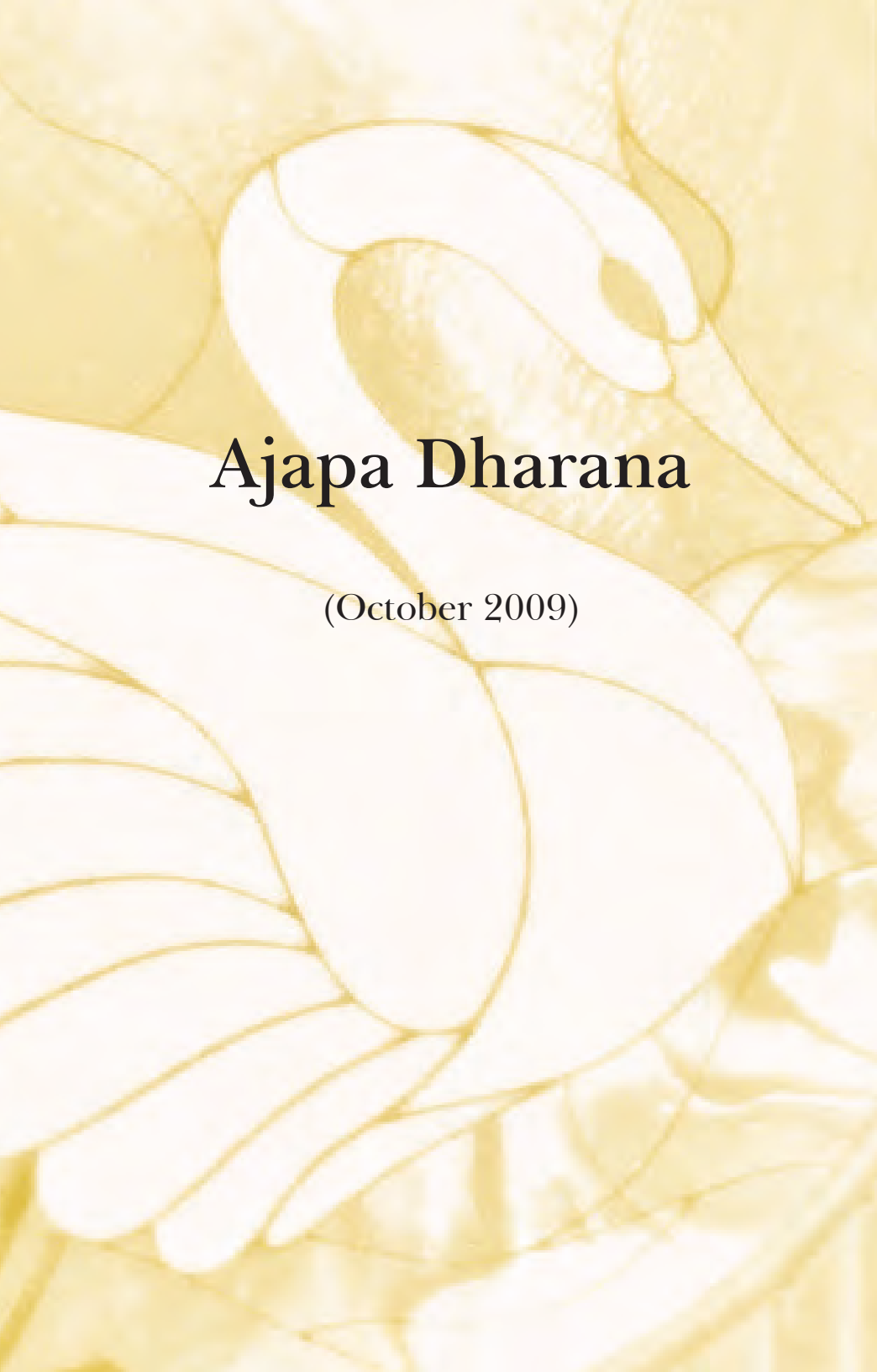
How can one be open? That is a difficult question to answer because each one expresses openness in a different way. Generally people think openness is when they dump

their social, family or other problems, but this is not real openness or open communication.

Open communication means one is able to consult the guru, see the validity of the advice and adhere to that advice without bringing the mind into it. That is the beginning of openness. The guru is not there for intellectual satisfaction; for that there are *pandits*, people who are knowledgeable, and who can convince an aspirant as they have read or developed their own understanding of a topic.

Guru is not for intellectual conviction, but for spiritual development. Therefore, the only way to have open communication is by developing trust and faith. Open communication is established not by applying the mind but by becoming innocent and simple. It has to happen spontaneously. One cannot make an effort to achieve it. It only happens as one develops more trust in the guru.



A stylized white swan is depicted on a yellow background. The swan's head is turned back, looking over its shoulder. Its neck is elegantly curved. The wings and tail are composed of several large, overlapping, teardrop-shaped segments, creating a sense of movement and grace. The entire illustration is rendered in a minimalist style with clean white lines and a solid yellow background.

Ajapa Dharana

(October 2009)

Ajapa Dharana

In the ancient vedic and upanishadic literature, ajapa dharana is the main meditation practice referred to. Throughout the ages, masters, rishis or seers prescribed ajapa dharana as the social application of meditation. Although there are references to other techniques and forms of meditation, like vedantic and tantric meditations, the teaching given is primarily on ajapa dharana. No other form of meditation has been described in such depth.

Ajapa literally means spontaneous, natural, effortless mental repetition. *Dharana* means one-pointed concentration. The word ajapa is also associated with the Gayatri mantra, the mantra of the sun, which is the mantra used in ajapa japa. So ajapa dharana is meditation on the sun, and in solar tantra it played a major role in accessing the solar energy within the body.

Ajapa dharana is one of the few ancient meditations which was devised to internalize the consciousness. The yogis and the seers considered it so important that they gave it the form of both a philosophy and a practice. The entire *Hamsa Upanishad* is devoted to the philosophy and practice of ajapa dharana. It describes the complete theory and also the progressions.

Stages of awareness

Ajapa dharana emphasizes gradual step-by-step awareness, starting with gross awareness, then moving into subtle levels

of awareness. Physical awareness is the preparatory stage, then breath awareness, then visualization of the breath moving in the psychic passages, and then combining breath awareness with mantra. Each level is like a step that one takes to go deeper into the mind and psyche.

The common factor in all the stages is *kaya sthairyam*, stillness of the body, which plays an important role in developing concentration. Kaya sthairyam is the basis for all meditation techniques and practices. Even if there is a slight movement, the mind will begin to identify with that movement, and the focus of concentration will be broken. Real dharana practice can only begin when the body is absolutely steady and immobile. In order to achieve perfect stillness of the muscular, skeletal and nervous systems, one needs to work through the preparatory practices and the meditation asanas, so that ultimately the effect of asana becomes *sthiram sukham asanam*, stillness and comfort in the posture.

The actual concentration or process of meditation begins when one fixes the mind on something, which in ajapa is the breath. The breath is used as a ladder to experience the pranic movement. The breath is the gross experience and the pranic movement is the subtle experience. However, in ajapa dharana, awareness of the breath is reversed. One becomes aware of the natural movement of the breath from the navel to the throat on inhalation and from the throat to the navel on exhalation. Normally we breathe the other way, but in ajapa the breath is visualized moving in this way in the frontal passage.

Three psychic passages have been described: the frontal passage, the spinal passage and a third passage which curves following ida and pingala nadis. In ajapa dharana the practice begins with frontal passage awareness. Most people are familiar with the area of the body between the navel and the throat, for example, the movement of the diaphragm and the expansion and contraction of the lungs, so the movement of the breath can be identified and felt more easily in the frontal passage.

Once all the movements have been visualized, the practice moves to the back of the body. In the back there is no movement; it is like a cage, the ribs and spine are fixed, but awareness has to continue. So from movement one comes to stillness. Then the awareness can be rotated according to the stages of ajapa dharana.

In the space of stillness in the back, the seven chakras can be visualized as seven stars placed in one straight, vertical line in the space of the back. Now the awareness or perception has to move with the breath. Each chakra has to be seen at eye level, not from above or below. As one's awareness moves down, the vision also moves down, so everything is being seen at eye level. The awareness, perception and vision have to move together. Then the path of the nadis can be followed as they curve to the left and right of the chakras; this is the external exercise that has to be practised. Ultimately, when the external movement of the mind stops, the mind becomes one with the mantra.

Breath and swara

Some years ago, I made a scriptural study in order to discover the practices of dharana, just as Swami Satyananda had discovered and described the practices of pratyahara. In this literary research, there was only one main practice: awareness of the breath in the psychic passages combined with the mantra *Soham*. Sometimes the mantra *Soham* would be replaced by the Gayatri mantra, but that was the only difference. Gayatri is the long mantra of twenty-four syllables, and *Soham* is the *bija*, seed, mantra of Gayatri.

In that study certain concepts were quite important. The first concept concerned the *swara*, the flow of the breath in the nostrils, where we study the normal breathing cycle and how the breath affects and alters the right and left hemispheres of the brain. In normal breathing, the air travels through the nostrils into the lungs and then out. However, there is another process taking place at the *pranic* or energy level, which is activating and influencing the flow

of ida, pingala and sushumna nadis. In yoga this is the concept of swara.

One can breathe in and out through the left and right nostrils or both nostrils day in and day out, but there are specific times when the moods and behaviour reflect a particular state of mind which is affected by the pranic level. When the pranas are hyper, the mind is hyper; when the pranas are passive, the mind is passive; when the swara is active, the corresponding hemisphere of the brain becomes active. The only difficulty is that one does not know how to recognize which part of the brain is working, because in the normal state and behaviour, the thoughts and moods are always overlapping.

A storm in the brain

In the 1970s, research was conducted on the relationship between the flows in the right and left brain hemispheres. In the book *A Storm Every Forty Minutes*, the researchers say that every forty minutes in the brain, the energies change from the left hemisphere to the right and from the right to the left. A transfer takes place, and there is an overlap between the linear, logical abilities and the artistic abilities of the brain. This merging point is like the period of dusk between day and night. It is a 'storm' in the brain every forty minutes. Physiologically it has also been proved that the swaras change approximately every forty to fifty minutes.

The visualizations of energy used in different parts and passages of the body map the flow of the *nadis* or currents of pranic energy. In the body there is a web of veins and arteries carrying blood back and forth from the heart to all the parts of the body, so there is blood circulation, but if there is a deficiency in this flow, the organ will be damaged or die. Similarly, yogis say that there is a web of 72,000 nadis, which are the carriers of prana shakti to the different parts and organs of the body, so there is energy circulation. This web of pranic nadis is controlled by three main nadis: ida, pingala and sushumna.

Nadis

Ida and pingala flows represent the cross-currents of the brain, the swara of the brain, left and right, negative and positive, moon and sun, dark and light. Sushumna is the central, governing and controlling channel. When awakened, it leads to psychic and spiritual unfoldment and development.

According to hatha yoga, if ida nadi is flowing, one can work more effectively in the mental sphere; if pingala nadi is flowing, one can work better in the sphere of pranic energy, but if sushumna is flowing one can work in the psychic and spiritual spheres. This was also the statement made by Russian scientists who, in the early 1970s, carried out psychic research without any background in yoga. Their findings were published in the book *Psychic Discoveries Behind the Iron Curtain*, where it was mentioned that people were psychic and sensitive when both nostrils were flowing, but highly susceptible to suggestions when ida nadi was flowing. In their research the scientists came to the conclusion that ida, pingala and sushumna represent three different functions of mind, energy and body.

Anahad nada

Ajapa is sensitizing the mind to experience the sushumna flow. Real ajapa happens only when sushumna flows. Then one begins to access the unknown dimensions of consciousness, different psychic manifestations take place and sounds are heard. Nada yoga has defined nine types of sounds which one can hear after perfecting ajapa dharana, including the flute, waterfall, thunderclap, the conch, or bells. These sounds are vibrations inherent in one's personality. It is called *anahad nada*, unstruck sound. Sound is created by striking two objects together. Even speech is the coming together of the lips and tongue, the opening and closing of the vocal chords. Striking two objects together always brings forth sound, but in anahad nada, the sounds are vibrations inherent in every individual.

In yoga, this is the first level of psychic experience, not seeing visions of devils and gods, which is a result of one's conditioning. It is an auditory experience, which is followed by seeing the 'blue pearl', as mentioned by Baba Muktananda in his book *Chit Shakti Vilas*, 'The Play of Consciousness'. Prior to the experience of seeing the 'blue pearl', he describes the sounds that one hears due to the vibration of the pranas. Subtle vibration is experienced as a sound, water falling being the subtlest. The other sounds are those of the conch, flute, bells and thunderclap.

These sounds also represent the energy structures in the body and how far one is able to access them. It may be possible, for example, that for a couple of years one may only hear the sound of a thunder clap and ask, "Am I stuck in this stage?" Or one might hear bells, think one is developing tinnitus and go to the ENT doctor. However, it is not a medical condition; it is just sensitized awareness, and one has to recognize that it is not an illness but a state of experience.

Psychic passages

The first auditory experience in ajapa dharana takes place when the sushumna flow is used for the cultivation of psychic awareness and combined with mantra. The sushumna flow has to be visualized in different psychic passages in the body: sometimes in the frontal passage between the throat and the navel, sometimes in the passage from the navel to the eyebrow centre, sometimes in the spinal passage, sometimes it is a circular passage and sometimes it is crossing each chakra.

Each movement of a nadi will bring forth a different experience. If ajapa dharana is done in the frontal passage, the experience will be of one kind. If it is done in the spinal passage, the experience will deepen. If one moves up from chakra to chakra along the spine and then down again, the experience will be different. If one rotates between the spinal and frontal passages, a different state of consciousness

will be induced. Initially, one needs to have flexibility to go through the different flows. If it is easy to visualize the frontal passage, it should become easy to visualize the spinal passage. If this can be done, it is easy to visualize the rotation, and it should become easy to visualize the ascent and descent. There has to be mental flexibility and mental training so that the mind becomes sensitized. Then the mantra is added.

Mantra

Mantra internalizes the external, extroverted awareness. One becomes less distracted by the senses and the outside environment, and more aware of one's internal behaviour and nature. The simplest mantra is *Soham*, but there are times when the guru mantra or other mantras are used to create a specific effect. If one needs healing, for example, instead of repeating the mantra *Soham*, one can repeat the bija mantra of the healing Mahamrityunjaya mantra, which is *Jum saha*. If one wants to go deeper into meditative and psychic states, one can use the bija mantra of the Gayatri mantra, which is *Soham*.

Some people use the full Gayatri mantra of twenty-four syllables. One whole mantra is repeated while breathing in and one while breathing out. It is quite a long breath, not two, three, four or five seconds. It takes about twenty-four seconds to chant the Gayatri mantra once. Practising ajapa dharana with the full Gayatri mantra will take approximately one breath per minute. However, when one is not trained and the body is not ready, it will become stressful. That is not the aim. Therefore, one should do *Soham* with simple inhalation and simple exhalation, with normal relaxed breathing in and normal relaxed breathing out. This is the beginning of the ajapa dharana practice. Sushumna and mantra are the two main tools to go into the dharana state.

There are three ways of repeating a mantra: *vaikhari*, verbal repetition, *upanshu*, whispering, and *manasic*, mental. There is another form known as *shravic*, meaning heard,

which comes from the word *shravana*, to hear. Generally, in mantra meditation the first three forms are used. If the mind becomes too introverted with mental repetition and one begins to doze, in order to bring back the awareness and alertness, whispering should be done. If one feels sleepy while whispering, verbal repetition should be done to bring back mantra awareness. The highest form is mental repetition. However, if the link is lost, one begins to whisper, and if the link is lost whispering, one practises verbal repetition. The reverse is also valid. When one becomes attentive and aware again through chanting out loud, one can revert to whispering, and when there is full control of the mind and senses, one can go back to mental repetition.

When steadiness in mental repetition develops, there comes a time when one does not have to repeat the mantra; it is heard as the inherent sound. Therefore, in ajapa one should try to listen to the sound behind the one made verbally or mentally. It is as though one hears somebody say *So* and somebody say *Ham*. Swami Satyananda said that it is the sound of the breath. In his lectures on mantra, he defined the mantra *Soham* as the sound of the breath, not as a repeated sound, but as a sound heard within and emanating from the breathing process. It is audible, and in the shravic stage the effort to repeat stops, and one simply begins to hear and concentrate on that.

Wherever there is movement, there is bound to be sound. Even moving a hand creates a sound, although it is beyond the range of hearing. Waving a stick in the air, one can hear the whoosh of the stick moving in the air. One cannot hear the whoosh of the hand in the air, but still a sound is being created. In breathing, friction is creating sound although it is not audible.

In Zen meditations people close their eyes and simply listen to sounds. They are able to hear a person walking towards them, the movement of the clothes, the movement of the legs. Sadhakas proficient in Zen meditation can hear people approaching from a distance. No matter how silent

one is, each movement is creating vibration and sound. The sound of the breath which yogis have experienced during inhalation is a *so-o-o-o-o* kind of sound and in exhalation a *ham-m-m-m-m* kind of sound.

Extending the sushumna flow

In the beginning, the ajapa practice combines the breath: *So* with inhalation, *Ham* with exhalation, and visualization. This preparation is actually ajapa pratyahara, because we are training ourselves. Dharana happens when we begin to experience the first stirrings of ajapa, when we begin to experience the anahad sound and develop awareness of *nada*, subtle sound.

We are trying to activate one specific nadi, sushumna, not the entire range of nadis, not even ida and pingala. Different techniques and methods can be used to eventually come to the point where sushumna is active, not just for a short time but for longer periods. If we are breathing in through one nostril for forty minutes predominantly, the changeover takes about three to ten minutes, and then we breathe through the other nostril for forty minutes. So normally sushumna is flowing only for a short period, in the range of three to ten minutes, depending on how long it takes for the swara to change over. This short period of balanced sushumna flow is to be extended in ajapa. To facilitate the training, neti can be practised to clear the nasal passages, so there is no physical block to stop the flow, as both nostrils must be open.

In ajapa practice, it is important to become used to variations in the mantra and breath. Sometimes one emphasizes breathing in with *So* and breathing out with *Ham*, then it is reversed: *Soham* becomes *Hamso*. The mind should not become habituated and conditioned to one system only, for the power of visualization and thought is such that one might think that prana will flow in one system only. Changes are made to allow the natural expression of prana to manifest and emerge without conditioning the flow of prana.

Inside not outside

Mantra helps to focus the energies and the mind, and lead one to the first level of consciousness, where the deeper impressions are experienced and heard in the form of sounds. When I was living in the USA, I used to go camping between Christmas and New Year. One night, around 11 o'clock I started doing my ajapa dharana sadhana in the middle of a camping ground in the forest, where there was nobody around. Suddenly, I started to hear loud music. I thought maybe somebody had come and was pitching their tent nearby and had left the radio on in their car. I decided to give up the concentration practice and go to sleep. I waited five minutes, ten minutes, fifteen minutes, tossed and turned, opened my eyes, but I could not sleep because of the music.

I came out of the tent with my torch. There was nobody in the camping ground, but I could still hear this music. I got in the car, turned on the headlights, drove around, but there was nobody. I must have searched for the source of the sound until about one o'clock. Finally, I thought, could it be my head? Is there something happening which I am not able to comprehend? When I got the idea that it was coming from my own head, I started to look inside and I was able to reduce the volume. The music was in me and did not come from outside. For many months afterwards I discovered I had developed musical abilities. I could play any music on the harmonium after hearing it only once. I could replicate rock, jazz, classical, kirtans and bhajans. It was like the first experience of nada.

One can also experience a second level of consciousness where deeper impressions are seen, and can be expressed externally. If, when we close the eyes in meditation, instead of the dark space we see one colour for a long time, blue or green or purple or pink, not coming and going but semi-permanent, for five or ten minutes, that is an indication that we are in a different state of mind, and that the particular faculty or potency of the colour can also be

used. For example, if blue is a healing colour in the colour spectrum, and we see blue for ten minutes, it means that our healing abilities are at their peak at that particular point. We can even project our thoughts to heal somebody just as we can send a mantra to heal somebody. We receive many indications as we go through ajapa dharana. It is like being babies and learning to use our hands again. It is a new experience, a new journey and unfoldment.

The mind can be perceived in two forms: one that we are aware of and one that we are not aware of. Mind, consciousness and energy have to be seen in the form of an ocean. The sun is shining on the surface of the ocean. You dive into the ocean. As you go deeper, the sunlight diminishes and darkness increases. You go deep where there is absolute pitch blackness, nothing can be seen. Mind, consciousness and energy have to be seen in the same manner. At the surface level, we are interacting with our environment, with people, with the world; there is luminosity. We are aware of our experiences, ideas, thoughts, expressions, needs, behaviours, desires, etc., but as we go deeper the external awareness diminishes and consciousness becomes darker and darker. At that point awareness has to be developed. It is like putting lights in your submersible boat to be able to see the environment in dark waters. The light we put in our submersible boat is breath, mantra, movement and visualization.

Meditation

Meditation is a misunderstood word. People close their eyes and say, “I am meditating,” but who knows whether they are sleeping or not. Or they say, “I am very introverted.” Or they practise abstract meditations. However, there is no progression of the mind. For the mind to progress, yoga has defined a definite system and sequence: pratyahara, dharana and then dhyana, or meditation. People feel that pratyahara and dharana are preliminary stages and straightaway they want to jump into meditation. That is one reason why,

despite so many thousands of years of people practising meditation, the consciousness has not actually flowered. At the individual level one may feel some peace, happiness and awareness, but nothing beyond that.

In pratyahara, there is emphasis on and training in sensory withdrawal. The purpose is to provide a break from the continuous identification with sense objects. People are continuously thinking about their profession or family. When the obsessive thoughts which overpower the mind from time to time are not dealt with properly, they can create mental disturbance and tension. Only when one is able to disconnect from the attraction of the sense objects, which are external, will one be able to understand that there is something more which is not material, physical or sensorial but spiritual or psychic, not detrimental and binding but positive, constructive and freeing. With this awareness one moves into dharana, concentration, and dhyana, meditation. One develops the resilience to be in both the external and the internal spheres of awareness.

If we look at the meanings of the words pratyahara, dharana and dhyana, we realize that in this life we move only in the realm of pratyahara. Rarely do we move into the dharana state with the mind, character and nature and the quality of awareness that we have. If we are truthful to ourselves, we will recognize that meditators tend to lose the quality of awareness; they withdraw and become introverted. Even their mental awareness slowly decreases and they begin to behave like people walking on air. This indicates that our quality of mind, behaviour, character and normal expectations do not allow us to move into a pure dharana state. Most of our life, we are working at the pratyahara level, trying to come to terms with our own mind.

We 'meditate' to practise stress management, and learn how to deal with our mind. When we learn to gather our thoughts and feelings, we are dealing with the mind. Then we bring out our *samskaras*, impressions, and discover our phobias, inhibitions, limitations and insecurities. They exist

in everybody's life, just as the desire for love and other needs and expressions of human nature exist. When we learn to deal with all these manifestations, we are only managing our mind.

There are meditations which help to manage and balance the energy, like kundalini and chakra meditations. Energy and mind are interconnected. A mental state can influence the energy; highs and lows in energy can affect one's mood and behaviour.

Thoughtlessness is another practice in which one tries to keep the mind blank. However, it is only possible for a specific period of time, maybe one or two days, or a maximum of one week, because it is not the nature of the mind to be still and silent. In normal life, if the mind becomes silent, there is something wrong because it is not the natural behaviour of the mind. The normal mental behaviour is distracted and dissipated. Swami Sivananda used to say that the mind is like a wild monkey bitten by a scorpion and drunk on two bottles of whiskey. That is the nature of the mind. Drunk with ambitions, desires and expectations, or scorpion-bitten, meaning the mind is suffering from frustration and anxiety.

Stillness of the mind is only one result. The purpose of meditation is not stillness, but to extend the awareness so that one's actions can be harmonious. If one is tense, worried and anxious, fifteen minutes or one hour of thoughtlessness can be practised to overcome the mental agitation. However, a person who is peaceful by nature does not need to practise thoughtlessness. Perhaps that person needs to develop creativity and engage the mind in some other meditative experience in order to become more creative.

It depends on how people define meditation. Everyone says, "I practise meditation." However, most human beings cannot practise meditation, as it is beyond them. At our level, we can practise pratyahara and have glimpses of dharana. Those who are able to have glimpses of dharana are the yogis. This glimpse of maybe half a minute is

extended to a minute, to two minutes, to three, four and five minutes.

Yogis train themselves to extend the time of dharana. Only an enlightened yogi can experience dhyana. In that state of dhyana, they are masters of their mind and energy. They control prana shakti and manas shakti, and when they leave the body, they can make the pranas leave the body through the crown of the head. That is the indication of having perfected yoga. Indians know how yogis tend to die. They don't just close their eyes. There is the theory that the ideal death for a yogi is to lift the pranas up and push them out through the crown of the head, because that is the source, where the pranas enter the body. That is mahasamadhi.

Enlightened yogis experience the state of dhyana. At that stage, they are masters of mind and energy, and can lift the prana through their crown, which is the state of *maha samadhi*, the great, final merger, not the samadhi which is experienced in this body. Therefore, everything we do, although we call it meditation, is in reality only an effort to achieve pratyahara. Once we are able to achieve pratyahara, we can have glimpses of dharana and become yogis who begin to live yoga and not only experiment with yoga. Yogis do not learn yoga but live yoga. The yogic lifestyle and the concept of yogic culture flower when dharana is experienced.

The soul

In 1988, one of our sannyasins carried out research into yoga nidra at the Charing Cross Medical School in London, UK. He collected data using an instrument called BEAM, Brain Electrical Activity Mapping, which transforms the brain's electrical activity to a two-dimensional colour image with an outline of the head in the centre. The impressions of the brainwaves were colour coded. The sannyasin collected many images over a period of months. When he showed me his slides, I noticed that in one subject there was a point of light at the crown of the head. The subject was in her fourth

month of pregnancy. This point of light was not seen in the third month and it disappeared in the fifth month.

In India, we believe that the soul enters the womb in the fourth month, and there is a ceremony to welcome the soul into the body. This was substantiated by the BEAM image. The soul or energy or altered brainwave started in the fourth month of pregnancy and continued through the other months. The soul enters from the crown of the head into the body of the mother and descends into the womb, where it goes right to the heart of the child. The seat of the soul is considered to be the heart.

It is also stated in the Upanishads that the energy stays in the heart. *Angushtamaatrah purusha madhya aatmani tishthati*, the purusha, the individual soul, is the size of a thumb, glowing, radiating, pulsating infinite energy, residing in the heart. Anatomically, too, the heart is the strongest organ of the body. The day the heart stops, life stops.

Learn to live yoga

Generally people believe that in meditation the awareness has to be blocked and brought inside. Many people try to cut off their mind from other experiences. They go into a world of imagination full of peace, purity, harmony, balance, light, love and laughter; the list is endless. They are identifying with an altered state of mind which is not agitated. That is acceptable. In yoga, we have different visualizations, different feelings that we create and different attitudes that we try to develop; these practices are converting the normal state of mind into the opposite state of mind. The agitated mind becomes peaceful. The distracted mind becomes focused. However, even though there may be visualizations or experiences of lightness and light, experiencing the opposite of the mind is pratyahara; it is not dharana or dhyana.

These meditations are accepted forms of practice, but real meditation is the play of awareness. Real meditation is not cutting the wings of awareness, but identifying with

awareness. In the first stages of pratyahara, we extend our awareness outwards. In yoga nidra we become aware of the environment, of the noises around us. We acknowledge them and move from noise to noise. At night, however, we fall flat and start cursing the noise. Although we have been told to observe the sounds if we want immunity from them, we practise it in yoga nidra, but we don't do it in real life. That is what I mean when I say we practise, but we don't live what we learn. If at night we can identify and just observe all the sounds, music and loud speakers, they won't annoy us. We will fall asleep in three minutes. The problem is we don't live a yogic life. When the tools are being given, we only use them in the classroom; we don't apply them in our lives.

Pratyahara

We extend the awareness outward as in yoga nidra. We identify each and every experience: touch, contact between the body and the floor, the clothes and the body, the sounds, the smells, the different sensations. We are consciously, wilfully, extending our awareness to that level, identifying with and intensifying that experience. Even though it may be for short moments, the awareness is being extended. As a result we are training our mind to move out into the world and then move back in.

After some time it begins to happen naturally. The mind suddenly picks up a noise and identifies it and where it is coming from. At any moment we can extend the awareness and experience everything, and then withdraw the awareness. Even if a bomb goes off, you won't notice it. The awareness has been withdrawn; it is totally cut off and only focused on the object it is relating to. Extension of consciousness or awareness provides us with mental flexibility. To extend the awareness outwards and then withdraw it is pratyahara.

In the book *Jonathan Livingston Seagull* it is said, "Extend the awareness to the maximum. If you are here, know that you are here, and be here." It just needs a movement of

awareness, and this movement or flow has to be cultivated and developed. Only at this point does the meditative component of yoga begin. Pratyahara is extension and withdrawal, through which one gains control over the mental fluctuations. The mind will not be distracted now and the fluctuations of the mind will be managed.

Dharana

In dharana, no matter what one does, one identifies completely with what is holding the mind. There are many things which hold the mind, and there are many things which lose their grip on the mind. When two lovers are talking, one hour can feel like five minutes, but five minutes of debate and aggression with an adversary can seem like an hour. At a certain point the mind becomes completely one with its activity and one hour will feel like five minutes, but there are moments when five minutes will seem never-ending. Awareness fluctuates in the normal state, but in dharana it becomes continuous and constant.

In the 1980s, Ganga Darshan obtained its first computer, and as I was the most computer literate, I had to develop the software for the ashram. The language was BASIC. I used to write the programs at night, and I enjoyed doing it. After writing the program, I would do a test run and encounter mistakes. It used to drive me nuts, because it meant I had to check each and every line for a semi-colon, comma or full stop. But in that nuttiness of mind, I used to forget the time.

This as an example of how with intense attention, one loses awareness of body, time, place and what is happening. One is focused on just one thing. This is dharana, but sensory dharana. A programmer practises dharana, but it is sensory, outer dharana. The same dharana has to be practised internally. In the normal activity of the day, maintaining an equipoised state of mind is perfection of dharana. The opposites like elation and frustration, comfort and discomfort do not affect one's mental behaviour

or mental response. In dharana one becomes free from opposites, and there is a total understanding of the harmonious process of energy and consciousness taking place as one lives one's life.

When one hears bad news, one is disturbed, and the thoughts keep coming fast, but in the state of dharana one will hear the news, but be able to analyze it with more clarity and less agitation. It is like taking a step back and looking at a situation. It reduces the chance of reactive behaviour and one will be more in tune with one's peace rather than agitation, with one's clarity of mind rather than confusion. Dharana is a state where the mind is stilled and made free from the effects of opposites.

In pratyahara, the awareness is extended and withdrawn. In dharana, the stillness of mind is held as long as possible. When the stillness of mind can be held for lengthy periods, it becomes a meditative process, which is free from every conflicting, dualistic experience.

Initially, if five minutes feels like half an hour, that means the mind is agitated and not relaxed. Just as when you go in the water, you want to sink and just have to let go, it is the same here. Just do the practice and allow yourself to sink. It may not happen initially but in the course of time, in a month, in fifteen days, in twenty days, you will notice that your awareness, concentration, meditation is becoming deeper, and awareness of the external environment will lessen. So there will come a time when sitting for half an hour will feel like five minutes. Then one knows one is on the right track.

Koshas

Ajapa dharana is an interesting practice from the scriptural point of view, because in the scriptures it is the only dharana practice given throughout the different ages, in different books, by different teachers. All have spoken about mantra and breath and how the mind should be attuned to the flow of the breath and the vibration of mantra.

It is also interesting in the sense that we are approaching two aspects of experience: mental and psychic. The first understanding comes with the breath and the passages through which the breath moves. We train our mind to experience the flow of the breath in different passages, until breath awareness eventually converts into pranic awareness. We use the breath as a tool to guide our awareness. After some time, as awareness deepens and intensifies, the breath is relegated to the background and the pranic movement becomes more active. We begin to experience the pranic movement, thereby leaving annamaya kosha and accessing pranamaya kosha.

Mantra takes us from the mental experience to understanding our consciousness, from manomaya to vijñanamaya kosha. Therefore, breath awareness, which is physical and involves annamaya kosha, leads to the subtle awareness of prana and pranamaya kosha. Mantra stops the chattering of the mind, helps us focus, concentrate and stop the diversification and dissipation of awareness. It takes us to the experience of our subtle mind, tranquillity, space, the freedom and the space of consciousness inside. Mantra helps the movement from manomaya to vijñanamaya kosha. In manomaya kosha, we are aware of the word *Soham*. However, as we go deeper, it is not the mind saying *Soham*. The mind is resonating to the mantra *Soham* and becomes vibratory and a natural expression of the mental pulsation or movement, *Soham, Soham, Soham*. We begin to feel the mantra.

When the external movement of the mind stops, the mind becomes one with the mantra. We move into the non-intellectual, non-sensorial dimension of the mind. We begin to hear things we would normally not hear through the ears, to see things we would normally not see through the eyes, to smell things we would normally not smell through the nose. Extrasensorial awareness is considered to be the first attainment of ajapa dharana, and for this reason a lot of importance was given to this particular practice in the ancient vedic and upanishadic cultures.

One of the poet saints of India, Kabir Das, said the following about ajapa dharana:

*Aisa jaapa japo mana lai, soham soham surata gai
Chhaisau sahase ikkisau jaap, anahad upaje apai aapa.*

Fix the mind on the breath in such a way that both breath and mind continuously chant *Soham Soham* together. If that can be sustained for 21,600 breaths (the number of breaths one takes in twenty-four hours), then one experiences the vibrations of consciousness emerging: anahad nada, the unheard sound.

In these lines, Kabir Das described the whole practice of ajapa dharana. However, when it comes to doing it, the first part itself will take many years. The next step is merging the mind and the breath in such a way that both become one flow of awareness.

Swami Satyananda

When I was a young child, Sri Swami Satyananda gave me a mantra. He said, “Niranjan, sit here and repeat this mantra five times after me.” That was my mantra initiation. I asked him, “How many malas do I need to practise?” He said, “If you do one, it is an achievement.” I thought to myself, “This aspiring sannyasin can do at least five, six, seven, eight, nine or ten malas!” and I started doing it with great gusto. One day Sri Swamiji asked me, “Are you doing your mantra?” I said, “Yes, Swamiji, I practise nine or ten malas.” He said, “Really? I’ll teach you the way to practise mantra. Hold your mala in your hand. Breathe in and out, move one bead and say a mantra once. These three activities along with awareness of the symbol make four activities, which have to be simultaneous. Do it.” I sat down. I was able to do four, five beads, and since that time, I am still trying to complete my one mala. I have not gone beyond one mala, like Sri Swamiji told me, and many times I can’t complete one mala.

The mantra must be chanted in such a way that it becomes the sound of the breath and mind, and then that awareness must be held for twenty-four hours. We sit for half an hour of meditation and we have to bring ourselves back six times, maybe sixty times. It is not easy to have that intensity and depth of concentration. However, Sri Swamiji was a person who did it, and then spoke about it.

In the early days in Rikhia, Sri Swamiji used to say to visitors, "Don't come again." He used to say, "Every time you people come, you are distracting me from my concentration. The mind has to interact with you and it is not interacting with breath and mantra. You want to learn sadhana, but you are not allowing me to do my sadhana. Every day you keep coming to see me. Every day I have to break my practice and say, 'Hello, how are you?' Even for those five seconds my awareness is broken. So don't come again."

He maintained his discipline for ten years and did not see people. His only purpose was remembrance of the mantra with every breath, twenty-four hours a day. That is the perfection of dharana, when one can maintain single awareness without fluctuation, expansion or contraction, for twenty-four hours. With mastery of the mind, one will rule the world.

Many times I wake up at night and remember that I have been saying the mantra in my sleep. Other people have that experience as well. Even at night, they remember that they are saying the mantra. In lucid dreaming, too, one can say one's mantra. One's mantra governs the mind. It goes on unconsciously. In my opinion, this is an important practice, because if one can perfect this simple technique of ajapa dharana, that itself will take one into higher meditative states. Before sleeping at night, do this practice for ten minutes, and then go to bed. That is the ideal time and a tranquil and peaceful state of mind will be maintained while one is asleep. On waking up, one will be fresh.

When clouds cover the sky, the colour of the earth changes. In the same manner, when mantras cover the skies

of the mind, the mental experience is different. That is ajapa dharana: fine-tuning the annamaya and pranamaya koshas, to fine-tuning and harmonizing the manomaya and vijnanamaya koshas, and experiencing the peace and bliss, *shanti* and *ananda*, of anandamaya kosha. This happens in ajapa dharana. Therefore, it is a universally accepted sadhana, but the most difficult to practise and perfect.





Pratyahara

(May–June 2012)

Pratyahara

To introduce the practice and process of pratyahara, we must start from the basics, from kindergarten, as it is in the kindergarten of pratyahara that you create a foundation for observing and training the mind. Pratyahara is the beginning, which leads to dharana and then to dhyana. People think of dhyana as meditation and they want to practise meditation, bypassing pratyahara and dharana. However, that is never possible. One cannot ever practise meditation without perfecting pratyahara or dharana, as pratyahara and dharana remove the covering of the mind. The covering of the mind is the *vasanas*, the passions of life, the obsessions of life, the desires of life, the aspirations and the ambitions of life. As long as these *vasanas* are there, covering the mind, one cannot enter into a meditative state.

Just imagine that you put sugar in a plastic envelope, seal it and put it in water. The sugar will be submerged in water, yet as it is protected by plastic, it cannot merge with the water. That is the state of everyone trying to practise meditation without perfecting pratyahara and dharana. You go into your mind but nothing happens to the mind: no change, no upliftment, no eradication of a *samskara* or *karma*, no cultivation of a newer, better virtue; nothing happens. Instead, you get lost in the desire to see something: a form, a light, something manifesting. Therefore, you are actually conditioning yourself to see something, and often

the mind can create the image that you want to see. However, that is not meditation; that is self-hypnosis.

What is meditation?

The meaning of the word ‘meditation’ is absorption in the object of awareness. When you meditate, you are completely absorbed in the awareness of the object on which you are focusing, and there is no distinction between you, as the practitioner, and the object of meditation. There is no separation between the observer and the object. That meditation is realized as a state of mind.

Meditation is not a practice; it is a state of mind, a state of complete and total absorption. Just as the sponge absorbs water, in meditation, consciousness absorbs a new identity, a new nature, a new character; therefore, it is a state. Meditation is a state of mind, not a practice that can be perfected. Today ‘meditation’ has become a common word; however, in reality the correct words are ‘pratyahara’ and ‘dharana’.

Kaya sthairyam

Meditation practice begins with the cultivation and perfection of a very simple practice known as *kaya sthairyam*. *Kaya* means ‘body’; *sthairyam* means ‘stillness’: stillness of the body.

Kaya sthairyam is the first, premeditative, concentration technique to cultivate awareness. It is the preparation for pratyahara. It is the foundation for the development of the pratyahara state of mind, the dharana state of mind and the dhyana state of mind. Therefore, in the practice of *kaya sthairyam*, you will find aspects of pratyahara, of dharana, and of *dhyana*, absorption: separation of mind from sense objects, focusing and merging into the object of concentration, and complete absorption in the awareness of the object of concentration.

Kaya sthairyam is the basis for cultivating meditative awareness, awareness of the body as an agent of the senses. Information is being received. Senses are agitating the brain,

the mind, and the body. Therefore, the senses have to be stilled. To achieve this, sensations of the senses have to be recognized, the response and reaction of the mind to the senses has to be observed, and mind and senses have to be separated.

Kaya sthairyam helps to cultivate the ability to separate the senses from the mind, and to separate the experience from the experiencer. Right now, the experiencer and the experience are together and there is hardly any difference between them. In order to deal with situations in meditation and cultivate awareness, a separation must be created between the two, and this is the purpose of kaya sthairyam. With the separation of mind from the senses, stillness and silence is attained, and then begins the practice of pratyahara.

Progression of kaya sthairyam

Certain practices of pratyahara, dharana and dhyana require the body to be perfectly still. What disturbs the stillness of the body? The senses. Therefore, in the initial stages of kaya sthairyam you cultivate an awareness, a feeling, an understanding of the body. You cultivate an awareness of the sensory responses of the body, and you still them.

Kaya sthairyam is total awareness of the body, from the top of the head to the toes. Kaya sthairyam is awareness and ease in all the sensorial inputs of the body: the *indriyas*, the senses, the muscles, organs and joints. From there, it is rising beyond body awareness into the breath and the pranic dimension; it is regulating and harmonizing the pranic dimension.

First, you practice awareness of the body: awareness of the areas of tensions and tightness in the body, from top to bottom, and then awareness of different contact points of the body, the hands against the knees, the cloth against the skin, the body against the floor, different parts of the body touching each other, different sensations, the sweat, the heat, the pressure, the pain, the feeling of comfort or discomfort.

Your focus is awareness of pockets of tension and tightness and removing them.

Next, you practice seeing the reflection of the body in the mental mirror, from all sides: front, right, left, back, top and bottom, so that you have a three-dimensional view of your body. You then practice visualizing the body as a tree: the crossed legs become the roots, giving stability, solidity and support; the trunk of the body becomes the trunk of the tree; and the arms, ears, nose, and head become branches, stumps and twigs. In this manner, visualizing the body as a tree, one begins to experience the stillness of a tree, the immobility of a tree within the body.

At that point, one begins to observe the various sensations in the body. Unless the sensory responses in the body are recognized and stilled, *kaya sthairyam* does not take place. You can stop moving for half an hour, yet that is not *kaya sthairyam*. You can stop moving your muscles, you can stop moving your limbs, you can stop moving your organs, yet other subtle sensorial experiences will continue to alter and change the condition of the body. You have to identify each and every sensory input and still that input so that body awareness can be transcended. That is the initial focus. All the practices leading to the transcendence of body awareness are part of the initial stages of *kaya sthairyam*.

In the next level of *kaya sthairyam*, the components of *sankalpa* and breath are added to the practice. *Sankalpa* is important in order to reaffirm to oneself that, 'I am in control of my body. I am in control of my senses. I am in control of my mind.' If I am in control of the senses and the mind then I can will the body to be steady. That is the role of *sankalpa*: to reaffirm that 'I am in control', not 'My body is controlling me' or 'My mind is controlling me.' With this *sankalpa*, you go deeper into the experience of steadiness, physical stability, motionlessness, and merge your awareness with the experience of that physical steadiness. Awareness is not localized; rather, it becomes part of the total experience.

After making the sankalpa and going deep into the experience of steadiness, you observe the movement of the breath. When you come out from the body-consciousness, from the body experience, the mind has to be focused on something, and the breath becomes that object of focus. There are other things moving in the body but breath is a definite muscular movement, which can be felt. Initially the awareness is a *drashta*, observer: you are observing, not controlling the breath. You are not changing the breath, altering the speed, the rhythm, nothing; rather, you simply observe how you are breathing and where that experience of breath is being felt. You may become aware of the breath between the abdomen and the chest, or in the nostrils, or in the throat. Wherever the spontaneous awareness is, into whatever part of the body the breath draws your awareness, that is where you observe it.

After observing the breath, you begin to take control of the breath, making it long and deep; there should be no strain. First you watch, observe how the body is breathing, and then you take control of breathing. Make the breath long, make it deep, and make it comfortable. When you take control of breath, the speed and rhythm will change and the experience of stillness will become deeper, more intense, more absorbing. Finally, there will come a time when breath and stillness become one. You will hardly notice that you are breathing, although the breath is there. It will be subtle and full, complete. Through the breath, the pranas are stilled. Once the pranas are stilled, you enter into the mental dimension, and from that moment, pratyahara begins.

Yoga nidra

With the perfection of kaya sthairyam, the next stage is the practice of pratyahara. According to Sage Patanjali, pratyahara is the fifth limb of ashtanga yoga, and the purpose of pratyahara is to realize the nature of the mind. However, in order to do so, certain basic preparations must take place. The first preparation is absolute, complete

relaxation of the body, mind, emotions and prana. This relaxation is achieved with the practice of yoga nidra, the first practice of pratyahara.

The purpose of yoga nidra is manifold. First, it is to relax the agitations of the body and mind, so that they become still, allowing you to focus on whatever you do without mental or sensorial dissipation and distraction. Second, it is to cultivate an awareness of the subconscious mind and to explore its potentials. Third, yoga nidra itself becomes, in later stages, a practice of dharana. It is very difficult to say which practices belong to dharana and which practices belong to pratyahara, as in many instances the same practice in simple form is used in pratyahara and in complex form in dharana.

As you practise yoga nidra, you should be aware that it is the first stage, the first technique, the first practice of pratyahara. During the practice, try to be aware of the state of relaxation that you experience. Sleep is not important, therefore it is always instructed in yoga nidra, “Do not sleep,” and you are told to repeat to yourself, “I am practising yoga nidra; I am not going to sleep.” However, despite all this, you still go to sleep, which means that you have not perfected the split between the senses and the mind: *kaya sthairyam*.

In the early days, when I used to teach, I would not even include yoga nidra in the class; rather, I would teach *kaya sthairyam* for a month, and then move to the practice of yoga nidra. People enjoy yoga nidra, they like doing it. However, that is your partiality, your choice, your aspiration; that is not the aspiration of yoga.

You want to release your stress, so you do yoga nidra. You want to become quiet mentally; you do yoga nidra. You want to sleep; you do yoga nidra. You always do yoga nidra because you want to derive a certain experience or benefit from it. As a result, despite practising yoga nidra for many months or many years, you cannot control your drowsiness and sleep. This is an indication that you are not practising yoga nidra from the perspective of yoga, but from your own perspective. If you practise yoga nidra from the perspective

of the goal that yoga has set for yoga nidra, there will be no sleep, and the state of relaxation will deepen.

Ajapa japa

Relaxation is the first step in realizing pratyahara. After developing relaxation and the ability to extend awareness in all areas and dimensions of perception and experience, we move into the second practice of pratyahara: ajapa japa. In the vedic tradition, ajapa has also been recognized as dhyana, meditation, as in the higher stages of ajapa, the only awareness that remains in the mind is the mantra. Body awareness is gone, environmental awareness is gone, mental awareness is gone; only awareness of mantra and total identification with mantra remains. When it is practised as meditation, this ajapa becomes a continuous process of repeating the mantra. The poet-saint Kabir Das said:

*Aisa jaapa japo mana lai, soham soham surata gai
Chhaisau sahase ikkisau jaap, anahad upaje apai aapa.*

“The mind has to be fixed in the awareness of breath and mantra in such a manner that the breath begins to naturally and spontaneously chant the mantra *Soham*.”

If awareness of the mantra and breath can be maintained for twenty-four hours, or for 21,600 breaths (that is how many times we breathe in twenty four hours, at the ratio of fifteen breaths per minute), then the inner sound, the *anahad nada*, manifests. This anahad sound is the state of dhyana. In the Upanishads also, there is reference to *hamsa dhyana*, meditation on *Soham*. Similarly, for ajapa in the state of dharana, *hamsa dharana*, or ajapa dharana, have been defined. However, first one practices pratyahara ajapa.

Breath awareness

Pratyahara ajapa begins with body awareness and breath awareness. The breath is visualized in different ways, in different forms.

First, in the nostrils: awareness of breath as it goes in and as it comes out. When you breathe in, the temperature of the breath will be cool, and when you breathe out, the temperature of the breath will be warm. We maintain the awareness of breath in the nasal passage, in the nostrils, by becoming aware of the cool sensation and the warm sensation, as we breathe in and as we breathe out.

Second, awareness of breath changes to the throat, as the breath passes through the throat. The movement of breath in the throat has to be identified, experienced.

Third, the breath has to be visualized coming up from navel to the throat at the time of inhalation, and then down from throat back to navel with the exhalation. For this, you visualize a transparent pipe, extending from the navel to the throat. Just as we see the level of water rising up in a transparent pipe, in the same manner, when we breathe in, we see the breath moving up this passage. As we breathe out, the breath moves down in this passage, like the level of water in a transparent pipe, moving up and down. That is how breath has to be experienced in this region: from manipura to vishuddhi.

Fourth, the breath is visualized in the spine, from the base of the spine, from mooladhara chakra. At the time of inhalation, breath comes up and goes to the crown of the head, and at the time of exhalation the breath moves down, following the spinal passage, and comes back to mooladhara. In the first three stages, the breath is observed without altering the speed or rhythm; simply maintaining an awareness of the natural breath. However, when we are practising spinal awareness, the breath is lengthened and deepened.

In the fifth practice, there is a circular awareness of the breath, breathing in through the spine and breathing out through the frontal area. A circle of breathing is created, and then it is reversed: breathing in from the front and breathing out from the back. These are the five methods of breathing that are used in ajapa japa.

Awareness of the psychic passage

Next, one cultivates awareness of the psychic passage. Psychic passages are channels of prana shakti. This prana shakti is not the breath; however, breath becomes the agent through which we receive prana shakti. It is like getting protein. In order to have protein, one eats almonds; in order to awaken the awareness of prana shakti, one becomes aware of the breath. In the same manner that getting protein is the outcome of eating almonds, awareness of prana is the outcome of developing the subtle breath awareness.

Prana shakti flows through different channels in the body. These channels are known as nadis. In the practice of pratyahara ajapa, one develops an awareness of different channels of prana shakti, starting from the gross and moving to subtle. In order to cultivate awareness of the gross, one uses the body. In order to cultivate awareness of the subtle, one becomes aware of the nadis.

In the gross awareness, the first practice is feeling the breath move up from the left arm to the eyebrow centre at the time of inhalation, and down through the right arm at the time of exhalation. Then, while retaining the breath out, one moves the awareness along the legs from right to the left. Then, again, breathe in from the left side, and observe the breath as it comes up through the left arm to the eyebrow centre; breathe out and observe the breath go down through the right arm; hold the breath out and visualize the awareness moving from right to left along the legs. It is like triangular breathing. The next step is to reverse it: inhale through the right, the breath comes to the eyebrow centre; exhale through the left, and move the awareness from left to right, while retaining the breath out for not more than five seconds. That is the first practice.

In the second practice, one visualizes a luminous string running from the navel to the throat and observes with awareness as the breath moves up along this luminous string with the inhalation, and then back down with the exhalation.

The third practice involves the sushumna, the central nadi that runs along the spinal passage. Here, one visualizes a luminous tube made from particles of light and combines that visualization with breath awareness.

Awareness of the psychic passages is practised along the nadis, the passages through which the prana shakti flows. On a gross level, the breath is visualized as air that we breathe in and out, and on a subtle level, breath is visualized as flow of prana shakti. This flow of prana shakti takes place in the psychic passage. Once we cultivate awareness of this process, we move on to the third element of ajapa japa, which involves the corresponding mantra.

Ajapa japa starts from the perspective of pratyahara. These practices are followed by other practices that develop awareness of the subtle psychic passages in the body, and then mantra is incorporated. Once one has completed all the stages of ajapa japa in pratyahara, one then moves on to the practices of ajapa japa in dharana.



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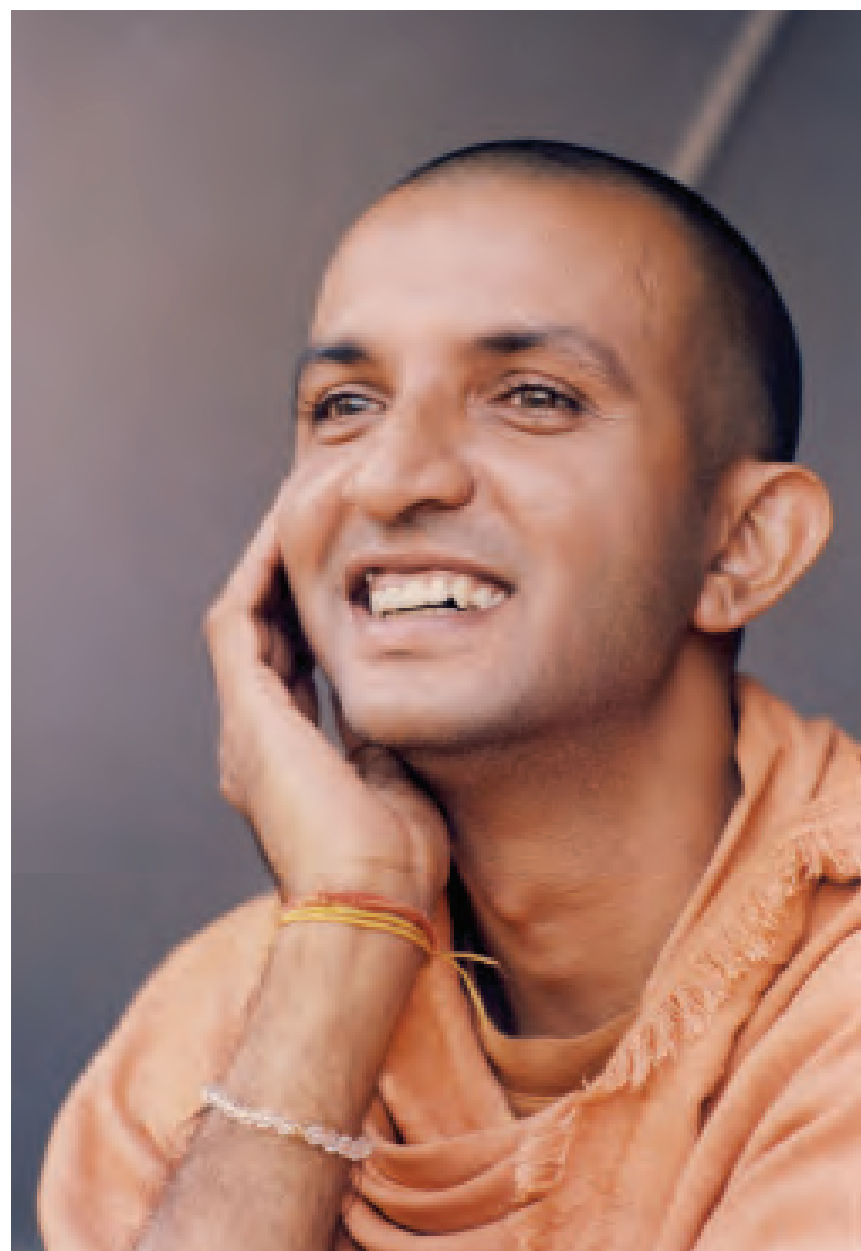












Swami Niranjanananda was born in Rajnandgaon (Chhattisgarh) in 1960. Guided from birth by his guru, Swami Satyananda Saraswati, he came to live at the Bihar School of Yoga in Munger at the age of four where he received training in yogic and spiritual sciences through yoga nidra. In 1971 he was initiated into Dashnami sannyasa, and for twelve years he lived overseas, acquiring an understanding of different cultures and helping further his guru's mission to spread yoga 'from door to door and shore to shore'.



He returned to India in 1983 to guide the activities of Bihar School of Yoga, Sivananda Math and Yoga Research Foundation at Ganga Darshan. In 1990 he was initiated as a paramahansa sannyasin and in 1993 anointed spiritual preceptor in succession to Swami Satyananda Saraswati. He established Bihar Yoga Bharati, the first university of yoga, in 1994, Yoga Publications Trust in 2000, and a children's yoga movement, Bal Yoga Mitra Mandal, in 1995. He travelled extensively to guide seekers around the world until 2009, when he received the command to commence a new phase of sannyasa life.

In 2010, he established Sannyasa Peeth, to enable seekers to experience the spiritual and cultural traditions of India in their essence. The year marked his entry into a phase of higher sadhana and tirtha yatra.

In 2013, he conducted the World Yoga Convention in Munger to celebrate the golden jubilee of the Bihar School of Yoga, and launched a new era of yogic renaissance. In 2013 he also commenced the arduous panchagni sadhana. In 2014, he embarked on a Bharat Yatra, an all-India tour, transmitting the gift of yoga to all. Since then, Swami Niranjan has been working to develop the next stage of yogic training and teaching, and has initiated several programs to help people deepen their experience of yoga and imbibe the traditional wisdom. Simultaneously, he has revived various ancient knowledge systems and practices of India.

In 2017, he received the Padma Bhushan, the third highest civilian award given by the Government of India, for the outstanding work in the field of yoga.

Author of many classic books on yoga and other spiritual streams, Swami Niranjan is a magnetic source of wisdom on all aspects of yogic philosophy, practice and lifestyle. He ably combines tradition with modernity as he continues to work for his guru's mission.



On the Wings of the Swan series consists of discourses and satsangs given by Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati at Ganga Darshan Vishwa Yogapeeth, Munger.

The teachings contain a wealth of wisdom applicable to all yogic aspirants seeking guidance and inspiration for living a harmonious life. A yogi from birth, Swami Niranjan's approach combines practicality, empathy, compassion, warmth, humour and penetrating insight. No matter what the subject, Swami Niranjan lends it an ease unique to him, bringing together an ancient spiritual tradition and an understanding of the current way of life. With each topic, he takes us right into the heart of the matter and provides a fresh perspective on it.

This volume covers lectures given during 1998, 2009 and 2012 to students of various courses held at Ganga Darshan. The topics covered include yogic perspectives on health, mind and human evolution, as well as meditation practices.



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